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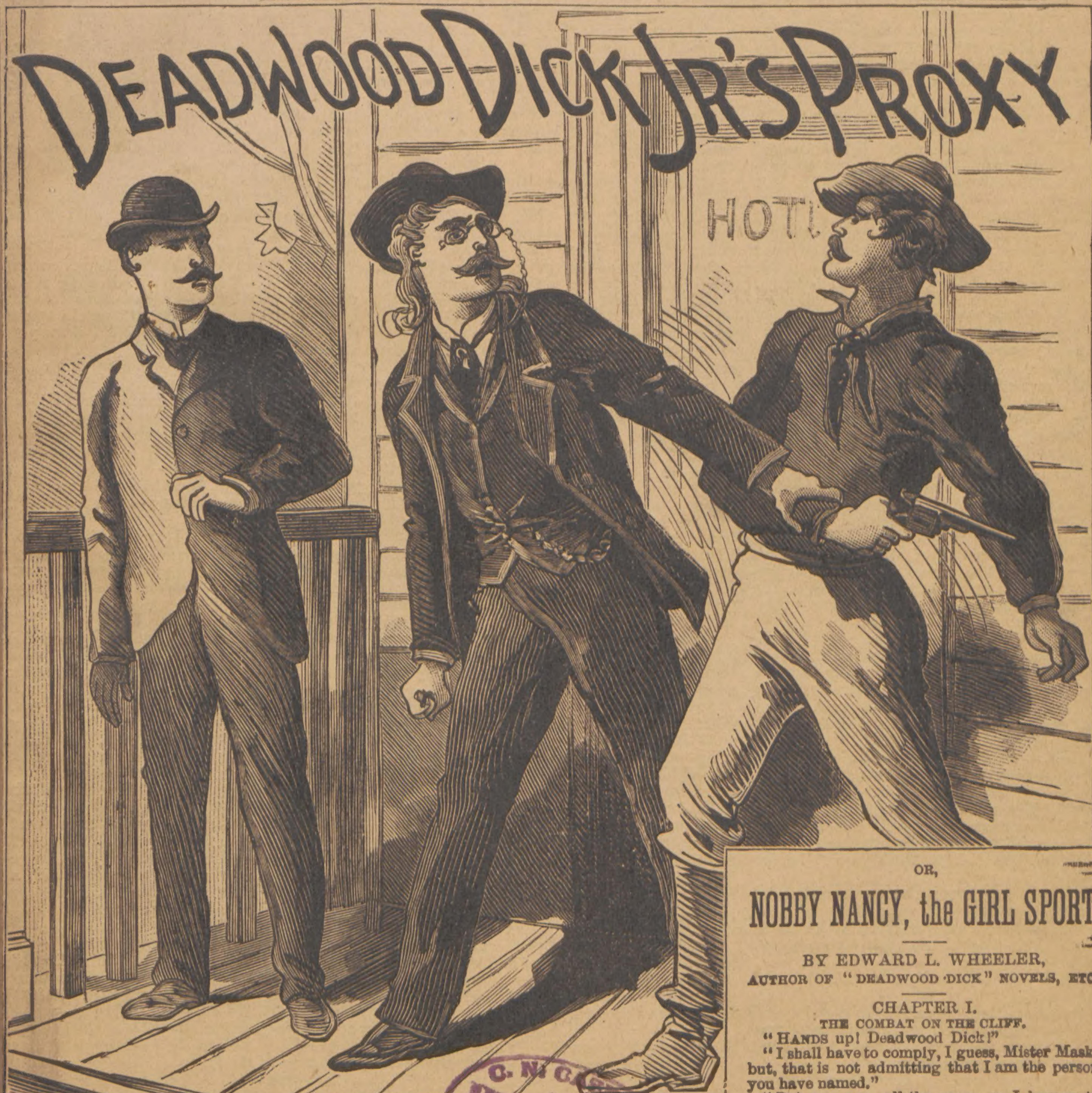
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OR,
NOBBY NANCY, the GIRL SPORT.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

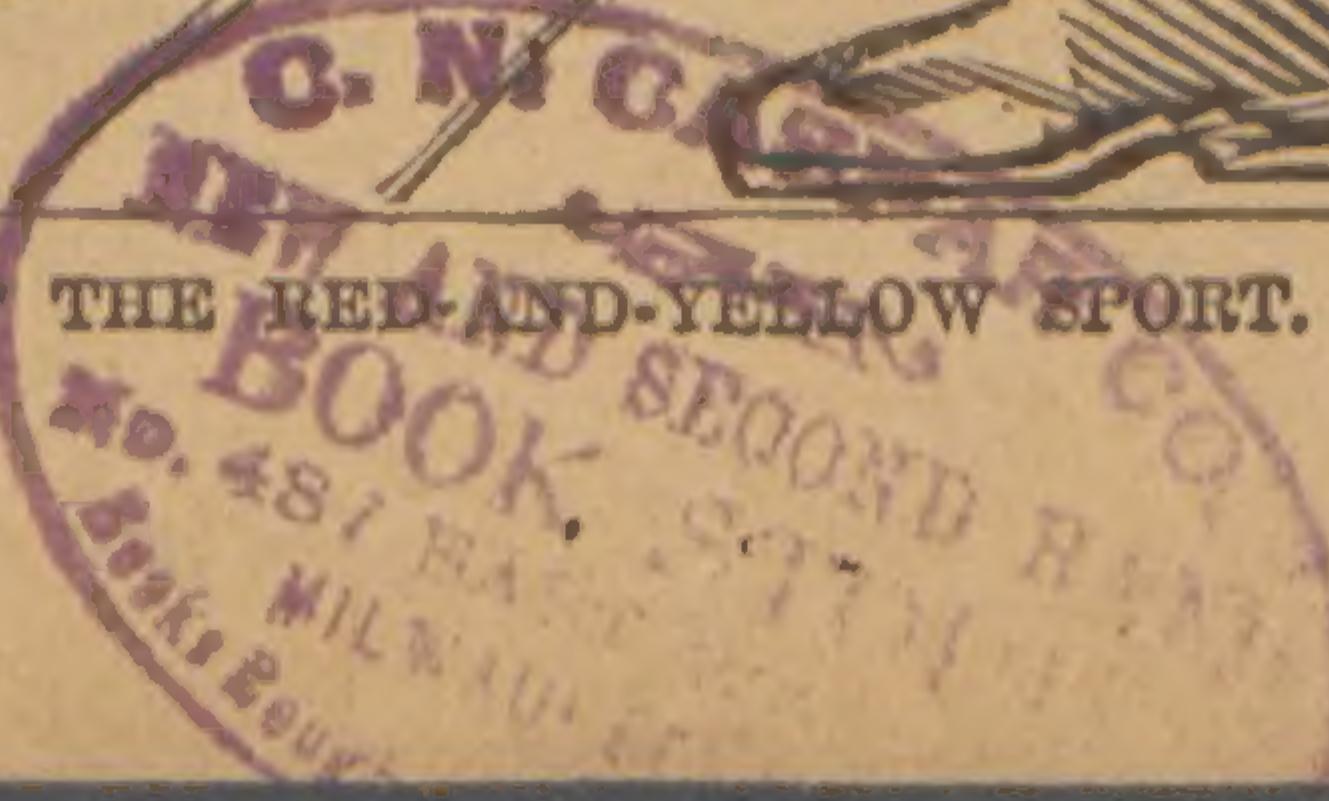
THE COMBAT ON THE CLIFF.

"HANDS up! Deadwood Dick!"

"I shall have to comply, I guess, Mister Mask; but, that is not admitting that I am the person you have named."

"But you are, all the same, as I happen to know, and I think you and I will settle a little

A HEAVY HAND FELL ON HIS ARM—THE HAND OF THE RED-AND-YELLOW SPORT.



score here and now. One or the other of us goes over this cliff—to his death!"

"Well, that is a rather startling bit of information," calmly spoken. "Perhaps before the performance begins you will not object to telling me who you are, for you certainly have the advantage of me. Just remove that mask so I can get a look at you."

"It need not matter to you who I am; it is enough that I am your enemy. How do you want to fight?"

"You do mean to give me a chance for my life, then."

"Yes, a slight one."

"Well, I'll fight you a fair wrestle, without the use of weapons, and the best man wins."

"I couldn't ask anything fairer, Deadwood Dick. I warn you not to try any trick, however, for perhaps I am as quick on the shoot as you are. Don't attempt to draw."

It was a novel situation—a novel proposal.

Two men had come suddenly face to face at a point where a mountainside trail bowed around a spur of rock, and where it broadened into a small plateau.

One of these men was masked, and had the appearance of having been lying in wait at that point on the trail. He was a man above the medium size, of muscular build and heavy limb.

The other was about the medium in height, with broad shoulders and supple, athletic form. He had dark hair, and keen and piercing magnetic black eyes. And his coolness, under this nerve-trying situation, was worthy of especial remark. His face remained as immutable as marble.

On one hand a high wall reached up and up; on the other was a sheer descent of some hundreds of feet. The man of the mask certainly had confidence in his own prowess, to have chosen such a spot for such a meeting; while he whom he called Deadwood Dick was assuredly not lacking in bravery, to have proposed a wrestle in such a dangerous place.

The man of the mask lowered his revolver cautiously, keeping his eyes fixed upon those of his opponent, and slung it at his hip.

That done, he advanced a step, as did also the other, eyes fixed upon eyes unwaveringly.

Another step, and both sprung forward as by one and the same impulse.

They met with force, and fell, locked in deadly embrace.

Followed then such a struggle as baffles description. The man of the mask had the important advantage in size and weight, but the other was his equal, or more, in every other point.

This way and that they rolled and writhed. It was plain that each mistrusted the other and was guarding against the sly use of a weapon as much as possible. It was the interest of both to keep from the edge of the cliff, and yet several times they came dangerously close to it.

They were locked in an embrace that neither had power to break, and at last both ceased the struggle and lay panting, still holding fast their deathly grip.

For some seconds they did not speak; then he of the mask was the first to do so.

"Dare you risk a fresh hold?" he demanded.

"If you dare," was the response, as brief as it was pointed.

"Then loosen on me and I'll loosen on you, and we'll part. But, curse you! try no trick!"

"Nor you, or it may mean death, swift and sure."

Together they relaxed their grip, and with a spring rolled away and each was almost instantly upon his feet, with hand ready to fall upon weapon.

As their eyes met this time an ejaculation escaped the lips of him called Dead-

wood Dick, for, in the struggle, the mask of his opponent had become loosened, and now had dropped to the ground.

The face revealed was a dark, firm, beardless one, the features of which were regular, the jaw square and set, and the eyes steely in their glitter; the brows, straight in line, adding firmness to the already firm, even grim, general expression of the countenance.

"Well, you have your wish," the man said, doggedly. "You can get a look at me now."

"Yes, Elmer St. Clair; I see you for what you are," the response.

"Like you, I do not admit the identity, but that is of small moment to us just now. Are you ready again—ready to make your bed upon the jagged rocks down below there?"

"But you are he, all the same, as you insisted a moment ago that I am Deadwood Dick," the rejoinder. "Yes, I am ready again, Elmer St. Clair!—murderer of wife! Come on, and let us see who is to be final master. I look for no quarter, but I warn you against using a weapon."

"I'll neither give nor ask quarter, Deadwood Dick. And the same warning about a weapon applies to you. I prefer pitching you over the ledge, to seeing your blood run here."

There was then a momentary pause, during which each man nerved himself for the final struggle. It must be life or death this time.

Eyes were fixed upon eyes, as before, and suddenly the spring was made, by both at once, and they were once again locked in that deadly embrace, though this time they remained upon their feet.

At first the advantage lay with the man who had worn the mask, but, gradually, Deadwood Dick regained what he lacked, and presently it was he who held the vantage in the struggle. In spite of superior size and weight, he who had worn the mask had met more than his match.

Both were soon breathing heavily again, and overstrained muscles were beginning to lose something of their power.

Gradually Deadwood Dick gained the mastery, and was bearing his man nearer and nearer to the terrible ledge. Not that he really meant to hurl him over, but he did mean to force a confession from him.

That he was the murderer for whom he had come in search, there could be no doubt. That this face was the original of a photograph Dick then had in his pocket, there was no mistaking. He had found his man sooner than he had expected, and meant to make him prisoner.

Gradually the superior strength and staying powers of the great detective told, and the man of the mask was being slowly but surely overcome.

Seeing it, he made one last and desperate effort, which Dick met with stubborn force.

At first Dick was pressed back, but, gaining a foothold upon a projection of rock, he braced himself there, and the strength of his opponent availed nothing.

Yet one more effort, however, the opponent made, exerting all his power in that last exertion, and just at that critical moment the projection of rock against which Deadwood Dick had braced his foot gave way.

Dick's leg shot out behind, and he came down upon one knee, having slipped nearly to the brink of the precipice, and in the same second his hold was broken and his opponent had him at his mercy! A quick effort, a sudden whirl, and Deadwood Dick was suspended over the ledge, head downward!

"Ha! I have you now, demon detective that you are!" the exulting victor panted.

He paused a moment, to get breath, holding tight to his foe.

"You thought to hunt me down, did you?"

he grated. "Well, you have found me to your undoing. It is here that you will finish your career, curse you! and no one will greatly mourn your loss, I guess."

"You dare not give me another at you," Dick coolly proposed.

"I am not such a fool as that, Dick Bristol. Only for your slipping you would soon have had me where I have you now. You are the very devil himself for grit and muscle. I had no idea you could be a match for me. But, the time of your death is at hand."

"Then you mean to let me drop?"

"That is what I am going to do, curse you! Have you any last word to say?—any last message to leave?"

"Were I to leave a message with you would you deliver it, or would it be only a waste of breath for me to word it? I'll not put you to much trouble, since you have proposed it."

"Yes, if it's anything I can do, I'll do it. I'd hate to refuse the last request of a dying man. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I want to send a parting word to my wife."

"Speak it."

"Write to Clyde Carleton, Bristol City, Arizona, and say: Tell Mrs Bristol that Deadwood Dick came to his death at Winding Ledge, Eagle Pass, Yellowstone Park, and that his body lies mangled in the bottom of the canyon beneath Arrowhead Plateau. That is all, and you may sign the letter or not, to suit yourself. Do not forget the name and address."

"I'll not forget," was the assurance. "You are a cool one, though," in a burst of admiration. "Many a man in your place would be whining for mercy."

"Not Deadwood Dick! If here I am to die, I'll die as I have lived. Having peace with God, death has no terrors for me."

"Swear to me that you will not hunt me down, Deadwood Dick, and I'll draw you up to safety."

"Never! If you draw me up I'll make you my prisoner if I can."

"That settles your fate, then. I had heard that you had been set upon my track by the dear relations of my late lamented better-half, and I was lying in wait for your coming to Pistol Butte. I meant to wipe you out before you had a chance at me."

"Then you admit that you are Elmer St. Clair."

"You know who I am, so there is no need to deny it. Take your last look around, great detective, and then away you go! Yours will be a painless death, anyhow."

Dick Bristol was silent.

He was held by one leg and one arm, and was debating whether or not to draw a weapon and try a parting shot at this demon in human guise.

But, he decided against it, for two reasons. First, it would be cutting off the only possible chance for his wife's ever learning of his fate; and then, too, the rascal could let go before he could draw and shoot.

While these thoughts were running in his mind the man of the mask suddenly let go his hold, and the Detective Prince went down, and down, through the hundreds of feet of space to the bottom of the gorge below, while his murderer rose and with a light laugh turned away from the scene.

CHAPTER II.

A BATCH OF NEW-COMERS.

PISTOL BUTTE was called the "livest" town in the whole Yellowstone Park region.

The little city—What is your Western camp unless it's called a "city"?—was a popular place, being amenable to the general laws only and not to the laws in particular which govern the Park.

It was not in the Park proper—that is, it did not lie within the limits over which the

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Proxy.

Government exercises paternal control, one reason for its popularity; but a pistol bullet could be sent into Uncle Sam's garden spot from the cliff that overlooked the camp.

The place had a sizable hotel, and enjoyed a share of the patronage the attractions of the Park brought to the region; and this share was no meager portion, for here could be enjoyed certain little privileges which were forbidden fruit in the Park itself. It was, in short, a wild Western mining-camp of the usual type, with the advantages of a pleasure resort superadded.

Late one afternoon, when the first of the stages—the regular stage usually had an extra, and sometimes two, for travel to and from the camp was considerable;—when the first of these came swaying and clanking into the camp, and drew up before the Park House, the leading hotel, the first passenger to alight was a person who attracted general attention immediately, owing to the striking peculiarity of his attire and his appearance generally.

He was a man about thirty years of age, at a guess, with long golden hair and mustache of the same hue, wearing a pair of gold-frame glasses, the same secured to his vest by a gold chain of slender pattern.

It was his attire, however, that drew attention most. Hat, coat, vest, trowsers—the whole outfit was of the very finest red leather, the hat, coat and vest being trimmed with bright yellow of the same material. A diamond flashed on his bosom, another on his finger, and a heavy gold chain crossed his breast.

He was certainly a gorgeous creature, gotten up for show, evidently, and carried himself with the air of one accustomed to admiration.

"My! but ain't he a darling!" exclaimed Mark Mason, the mayor of the camp, from the hotel piazza.

"He ain't nothin' else, Mayor Mark," agreed Brad Watson, proprietor of the Park House. "I wonder who an' what he is, anyhow?"

"I give et up, Brad," Mason rejoined. "But, we'll find out purty soon, fer a chap of that pattern must have a handle to match. I take him fer a card-sharp sport; don't you?"

The gay stranger, after pausing a moment to glance around, was advancing now to the hotel entrance.

Other passengers were alighting, but these claimed little or no attention.

He sprung lightly up the steps and entered the bar-room, and the proprietor of the house and the mayor, with many others, followed him in.

"Have you room for a stranger here?" the sport asked of the clerk at the desk, who stepped forward to attend to business, pushing out the register for the use of prospective guests.

"Yes, sir," the prompt answer.

"This the leading hotel of your town?"

"It is, sir."

"Can you give me a first-class room and first-class attention generally?"

"We will give you the very best the house affords, sir, if you are willing to pay the price—which you evidently are."

"Yes, I'll pay the price for what I want and in advance," drawing a handful of gold money from his pocket. "Just assign me to the best room in the house, and book me fer a couple of weeks."

The business was speedily done, and the gorgeous stranger registered himself as—"Gold Jack, of California."

As he laid down the pen and stepped away, a woman took his place.

She was tall and of graceful form, and that she was young was easily guessed. It had to be guessed, since her face could not be seen.

A heavy lace mask covered her face to the chin, so that no feature but the latter

could be seen. Her skin, as there revealed, was beautifully white and fair, suggesting a handsome face.

She desired a good room, and such being promised, registered—"Keen Kate, Card-Sharp."

"But, you have not given your place of residence," the clerk reminded, as he glanced at what she had penned.

"That is the best I can do for you," was the pleasant-toned response. "If it will not answer, you may set it down—the World."

And with that she stepped back from the desk, asking to be shown to her room at once.

Her request was complied with immediately.

As she left the room a man wearing a black mask stepped forward to the desk and glanced at the register.

He was no stranger there, at Pistol Butte, though no one knew who or what he was. He was known as Captain Mask, and in him the camp enjoyed the distinction of having a mystery.

This Captain Mask had come there shortly after the camp had been started as such. He never worked, but always had plenty of money, which he spent freely with the "boys;" and this, with the report that he had killed a couple of men who had tried to unmask him, was enough for the men of Pistol Butte; they little cared who or what he was.

"Keen Kate, eh?" he said aloud, as he read the name.

"Know who she is, Captain Mask?" inquired Mayor Mason, who was standing nearby.

"No, mayor, I don't," was the friendly reply. "Never heard of her before, if my recollection serves me."

"And now Pistol Butte has a double mystery," here put in the landlord. "A masked man and a masked woman. A pair of you, Captain Mask."

"Yes, true enough; and now I can understand the curiosity that has led persons to try to get a look at my face. I am curious to get a sight at this woman's."

"Wonder if she came masked all the way?"

"Yes, all the way, or as far as I enjoyed her company, gentlemen," here spoke up the Red-and-yellow Sport—as some one had already dubbed him.

Captain Mask favored him with a searching stare.

"Do you know anything about the lady, sir?" he made inquiry.

"Nothing, sir, except that she let out that she was coming here to try her fortune at game."

"As she is quite richly attired, something after your own flaming style, although less showily, I thought you and she might be companions, sir."

"I assure you not. I know nothing whatever about the woman."

"Well, we'll find out all in good time, no doubt."

"If she's willin' ter let us," the mayor conditioned. "If she ain't, et is likely ter be the same as your case, Captain Mask."

"Yes; that's true, I suppose. Well, this is a queer world, anyhow, and we are all more or less a mystery to our fellows, every mortal of us. She has her reason for wearing a mask, and really it's nobody's business but her own."

"I take that shot right home, Captain Mask," the mayor observed, with a light laugh.

Gold Jack, the Sport, was taking this all in, quietly.

He was the attraction of all eyes still, and aside from his fancy dress he was a fellow worthy of notice.

A supple-looking man, he was of good figure, and one to command a second glance

no matter in what attire he happened to be. His yellow hair and light mustache made him attractive.

"You are about right in what you say, friend," he said to Captain Mask. "A man has the right to follow his own whims, in a free land like this so long as his whims do not run counter to the law. If you wear a mask, and I wear leather clothing, that's our affairs."

At this some who had been staring at him intently turned their gaze away, or pretended to do so.

Another who had come by the stage was a whiskered fellow who had registered as Bill Bluff from Denver. Besides him were others whose names need not be mentioned here.

Bill Bluff was a rough-looking individual, clad in a coarse business-suit and wearing a broad slouch hat.

In a little while after the arrival of the first stage the extra came running into the camp, bringing with it another quota of passengers, and the first to alight was a woman.

She was a sprightly, petite personage, in jaunty male attire of dark bronze velvet. She wore a silk hat that became her well, and carried a light cane. The other woman was eclipsed by this fresh arrival, and Pistol Butte was ready to do homage to the new-comer.

She cast one keen, flashing look around, and stepped straight to the hotel and led the way in.

Other passengers alighted right after her, both men and women, most of whom bent their steps in the same direction—that is, to the hotel.

Among these was a dark man carrying a grip, a fellow with beardless face, having a firm, even grim expression of countenance. His features were regular, his jaw square, and his eyes, under straight brows, had a steely glitter.

As this man entered he attracted no general notice, since all eyes were upon the woman who had preceded him, yet there was one man who gave a start at beholding him, and this one was the bearded fellow who had come by the first stage—Bill Bluff of Denver.

He eyed the man keenly, and his own eyes, black and flashing, gave forth a look which boded ill for the stranger.

The Red-and-yellow Sport, too, eyed him keenly, and from him looked to the man with the mask, as if comparing the two, or trying to study out something of both at once.

The woman, meantime, had stepped to the desk and was now registering.

"There you have it," she remarked cheerily, as she laid down the pen. "I'm as nobby as my name, too, and don't you forget it," with a playful jerk of the head.

The name she had set down was—"Nobby Nancy, of Nevada."

"You look nobby, anyhow," declared the clerk, admiringly. "You and the Red-and-yellow Sport there would make a nobby pair, bang me if you wouldn't." And he jerked his head toward Gold Jack.

"I'm not caring for a pard, at present, thank you!" the Girl Sport rejoined playfully.

With that she left the room, having asked to be shown to her own, and as she went out Captain Mask gazed after her.

What his thoughts were, none might guess, but eyes were upon him, those of the dark man with the grip, those of Bill Bluff from Denver, and lastly those of the Red-and-yellow Sport of Yellowstone Park—already so called.

CHAPTER III.

PUZZLING POINTS APPEAR.

THE Girl Sport having gone from the room, and others who had worked in ahead of him having registered, the dark man of

the beardless face now stepped forward to the desk.

"Have I allowed my chance to pass by?" he asked, "or have you still another room left?"

"Got several left, such as they are, sir," was the reply. "The choice have all been taken, though."

"Let me have the best of the lot, then, and I'll speak now for the next better one that happens to be vacant."

"Can change you to-morrow, sir. People going and coming every day, and no trouble to please everybody who is patient."

"And I'm the most patient man you ever saw."

The man's tone was quiet but firm, not expressive of much of anything outside of pure business.

He subscribed himself as John Hyne, Omaha.

As he laid down the pen a hand fell upon his arm, and he looked quickly to learn who had accosted him.

It was Bill Bluff, the man from Denver.

"A word with you?" he asked briefly.

"Certainly, sir," was the response. "What is it?"

"Let us step out to the piazza, for it's something important."

He had spoken in low tone, so that no other might hear, and Mr. Hyne followed him out.

"Now, sir, what is your business with me?" Mr. Hyne asked, when they were upon the piazza. "You are a stranger to me."

"If I am, you are no stranger to me. I know you, and maybe it was useless for you to register, for I'm going to call you to account and you may sleep out-doors tonight."

"Why, man, you amaze me! I come here a stranger; do not know a soul in this region. You have mistaken your man."

The man spoke earnestly yet fearlessly.

"Mistake that face of yours? Never! Do you forget our struggle on the cliff that day, when you sent me over, to my death, as you supposed?"

"I now know that you have made a mistake, sir," was the cool rejoinder. "I have never had such a struggle as you mention, neither with you nor with any other man. I am innocent of the charge you make."

"Well, hang your brazen impudence!" the man of the whiskers cried. "Don't you suppose I'd know that face of yours to my dying day? What do you take me for, anyhow? I'm neither foolish nor crazy, but know what I'm talking about well enough. I mean to have satisfaction out of you!"

"You may get more than satisfaction, sir, if you are too hasty about it," the firm and quiet warning. "I tell you plainly that I am not your man, and that is enough—or ought to be."

"But it ain't, for I know your face. Hang it! do you want to make my own eyes out the liar, man?"

"They are fooling you this time, sir, that is plain as can be."

"Then can you prove who you are, and where you were at a certain time I'll mention?"

"I could do that, if it became necessary that I should do it."

"It's necessary now, then."

"Why?"

"Because, it's prove or fight, that's the long and the short of it. You are the man I take you to be."

"What is the name of the man you mistake me for?"

"I don't know your name, but I know your face hard and fast enough."

"What is your own name, then?"

"It is Bill Bluff, at present. Come, what is the use of your holdin' out, when I know ye?"

"But, you do not know me, my man! I have never in my life figured in such a tus-

sle as you mention. You can take my word for it or leave it alone, just as you please."

"Can, hey? Draw a popper and defend yourself!" and with his words Bill Bluff whipped out a revolver, but a heavy hand fell on his arm at the same moment—the hand of the Red-and-yellow Sport. He, too, had stepped out to the piazza, by another door, and had come to the corner in time to hear something of what was said.

"Don't be too hasty, partner!" he spoke pacifically, but warily.

"You were just in time to save his life, sir," said Mr. Hyne, calmly. "If he had leveled that weapon I would have drilled him."

"You'd have drilled me?" cried the baffled Bill Bluff. "I don't jest get on to how you'd 'a' done it, when I had the drop on ye. Sport, you are not in this, so s'pose you step aside."

"I'd have done it with this," and Mr. Hyne drew from his jacket pocket, in which his right hand had been thrust, a formidable derringer. "I had you covered all the time, my fine fellow, suspecting you meant me no good by calling me out here."

"Because you had reason to fear me, though you left me for dead when you—"

"I tell you again, and for the last time, that you mistake your man. If you still insist on it, I'll have you arrested for my own protection."

"Well, you have got a nerve, I must say. You are two against one, now, so I'll have to take water for this time, but I warn you that I'm going to have proof for who you are."

"All right; if you'll be patient, I'll give you the proof, after awhile, but not now."

Again thanking the Sport, Mr. Hyne turned and entered the house.

This little scene, though very quiet, was beginning to draw attention, but it was over before a crowd could collect.

"I'd like to talk with you for a moment, my man," the Red-and-yellow Sport said to Mr. Bluff.

"You don't want to think you can shut my eye," was the gruff response. "I am up to you every time. You and that fellow are in cahoots, or you wouldn't been on hand like you was."

"You mistake, sir; I know him not, though I am pretty sure I recognize his face. If he's the man I take him to be, he and I are no friends, be sure of that."

"Do you mean that?"
"I do, for a certainty."

"Well, what is it you want to see me about?"

"I want to ask you something about yourself, and why you hate this stranger. What was it you charged against him?"

"Well, see here, stranger, before I shoot off my mouth to you, I must know somethin' about ye. I've only got your word for it that you don't stand in with him, as it looks like you do."

"I tell you again I do not. In fact, I'll tell you privately, if that fellow is the man I take him to be he hasn't a worse foe in the world."

"Do ye mean that?"

"Then let's walk down the street here and have a chat. This fancy dress of yours is drawin' too much of a crowd around; a fellow can't speak his mind out loud at all."

"All right; but whether it's my suit or your big whiskers that draws them, I can't say."

The bewhiskered fellow gave the sport a quick, keen glance.

Leaving the piazza, they sauntered down the street, the Red-and-yellow Sport drawing attention from every side.

"Now," Bill Bluff asked, "who do you take that man to be?"

"I do not want to let out his name, Mr.

Bluff, and especially not to a man in disguise."

"Who is in disguise?"

"You are."

"I thought you suspected it, when you spoke about my big whiskers. Say, is it out of fix so as to give me away?"

The Red-and-yellow Sport smiled, having so easily verified the suspicion he had formed that the man was in disguise; for it was a suspicion only; he had nothing of proof.

"No, your disguise is perfect," he declared. "It was only a suspicion on my part."

"Now I believe you are lying to me for sure, Sport."

"I assure you I am not. But, tell me who you are. If this man is our common foe, there is no reason why we should not work together against him."

"That's so; but, I'm used to working alone, mostly. And, anyhow, how will you know but what I'm tellin' you a lie?"

"I'll have to take your word for it, till I get better proof."

"Well, then, if you want a lie I may as well make it a whopper while I am about it. I am Deadwood Dick, Junior!"

The Red-and-yellow Sport gave a start, looking at Mr. Bluff searchingly.

"You can't mean it, surely," he said with surprise.

"But I do, though, all the same. You needn't believe it, however, till you get proof for it, unless you want to."

"So, you are the great Western detective, are you? Well, if you are lying you have told a whopper indeed. I have heard of Deadwood Dick, but I thought he had settled down in Arizona."

"I said I might as well make it a good stiff one while I was about it. Now, who are you?"

"I'm simply Gold Jack, of California. It seems that here, however, I am to be known as the Red-and-yellow Sport of Yellowstone Park. But, I think when the boys get tired of so long a name they will restore the shorter one."

"And are you now willing to tell me who and what you take that dark fellow to be?"

"I did take him to be a man who was known here as Captain Mask, but now I am puzzled altogether, for it seems the original Captain Mask is here in this camp. I am all at sea."

"By Jupiter!" cried Mr. Bluff—as we will still call him. "We are both on the same lay, partner! I know he's the same man, for didn't I see his face when he pitched me over the cliff? This other Captain Mask is a fraud, and don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY MORE COMPLICATED.

THE most popular evening resort of Pistol Butte was the Palace Parlor.

It was a gaming place, large and roomy, elegantly furnished and equipped for games of the various kinds.

There was no bar, and the place did not cater to the rougher element at all, though some of the worst characters in the camp dropped in occasionally to yield up their dollars to fickle chance.

On the evening following events in order, when the Palace Parlor began to liven up to the business of the night, the new-comers to the camp dropped in, singly and in pairs, till finally all in whom we have interest were assembled beneath that roof.

There was Gold Jack, the "Red-and-yellow Sport;" Keen Kate, the Card Sharp; Nobby Nancy, of Nevada; John Hyne, from Omaha, Bill Bluff, the rough, whiskered man;—in short, nearly all the strangers who had come to the camp that day. And, besides these, were Captain Mask, Mayor Mark Mason, Brad Watson the hotel proprietor, and other leading citizens.

Keen Kate, the Card Sharp, was richly attired in velvet and satin, and almost eclipsed the charming Nobby Nancy. She still wore her heavy mask of lace, however, and nothing of her face could be seen save the chin—white and fair and suggestive of beauty, as already described. She was there alone, so far as could be noticed, as was also Nobby Nancy, and if the two were anything to each other it did not appear on the surface.

The Red-and-yellow Sport was not as early as most of the others, though none of the new-comers could be said to have come in early, and when he entered he was soon accosted by Bill Bluff.

"Our man is here," he said, in low tone.

"Yes; and I see you are bound to have it appear that we are working together, too, sir."

"That talk of ours this afternoon corned that, Gold Jack. There's no use now trying to make it appear that we ain't."

"If not, it certainly is corned now, as you call it. But, what were you going to say about the man?"

"Was going to say we'd ought to get at him, somehow."

"Take my advice and don't be too brash about it, though, even if you are the man you told me you are. Captain Mask is said to be a powerful fellow, and he has the reputation of having killed one or two men. Then, too, we don't know which of these is the man we are after—the one with the mask or the one without. Here is a hatful of mystery, Bill Bluff."

"It may puzzle you, but it don't puzzle me a bit, far as that dark-faced one is concerned. I know he is my game, as I told you this afternoon. This one with the mask must be a cheat; can't get around it any other way. I'd know that face anywhere, I tell ye. I know the real Captain Mask has got a bad name, but I'm not afraid of him all the same. If you'll back me, I'll go and snatch the mask off the dummy here and now."

"No, sir; I'm not in it at all—at any rate, not yet."

"Don't mean to acknowledge that you are afraid, do ye? You don't look like a coward."

"Call it that if you want to; I'd rather take it slow and easy and let the matter work itself as far as it will."

"Then it's plain that you are not a detective. I s'pose you ain't ready yet to answer that question I asked you this afternoon—why it is you are after this same man I am after, eh?"

"As I told you then I must tell you again, I am not ready to let that out. When I am, then I'll tell you all about it. Please do not question me on that point again. And, take my advice and be wary how you tackle this man, or you may get worsted in the undertaking."

"All right, I'll take your advice, but you needn't fear about my getting the worst of it if it comes to a tussle. I'm game, every time."

"You admit that you did get the worst of it once; you might again."

"I slipped the last time—a poor excuse, I know, but the fact; and only for that I would have come out on top, I think. But, I'll hold back a little now and give you a chance to do something."

With that Bill Bluff walked away, the Sport looking after him in something of a puzzled manner.

Gold Jack moved leisurely around the room, looking at what was going on, and finally took a seat alongside Mr. John Hyne of Omaha.

"This is quite an institution, isn't it," he offered remark, declaratively.

"Yes, it certainly is that," Mr. Hyne responded. "And quite an assortment of gaming talent, I should say, too."

"Yes, you are right, I guess."

"Then you are a stranger here, like myself?"

"I came in to-day."

"So did I, as you are aware. By the way, has your partner given in that he was mistaken in his recognition of me?"

"Let me set you right, at once, sir, on one point," said the Red-and-yellow Sport.

"That fellow is no partner of mine. You have taken that for granted because you have seen us talking together. I know no more about him than you do, except the little he has told me. And now to answer your question—he is as firm as ever in his belief that you *are* the man he took you to be."

"Well, he is mistaken, and I wish I could assure him of it. He referred to a struggle on a cliff, and I can swear I never was engaged in any such fight, not with him or any other man. Has he told you who the person is he mistakes me for?"

"He has, sir."

"I am anxious to know who it is."

"He says when he knew you, or had that fight with you, you were known as Captain Mask."

"Amazing! Is it possible that I have dropped down into a retreat for the insane in coming here? This is ridiculous, sir. But, there is a man here who is called by that name—Captain Mask."

"I know there is."

"What has he to say about him?"

"Declares that you are the *real* Captain Mask; this other a *dummy*."

"Well, well, here is more of a puzzle than I can see through. The fellow is eying us now. He will have good reason to think you and I are working together, as he charged this afternoon."

Gold Jack eyed the man keenly.

Here he had been noting what Bill Bluff was doing, and yet the Red-and-yellow Sport had not once detected him looking away from himself.

"Yes, I see he is," he admitted, having allowed his eyes to turn in the direction where Mr. Bluff stood. "He is suspicious of me, I have no doubt. I thought I had disabused his mind of suspicion, too. But, this is a new breaking out of the disease."

"Yes, and with good reason. But, how did you disarm his suspicion before? How did you prove to him that you and I are strangers?"

"I told him that instead of being in cahoots with you, as he expressed it, I recognized you as an enemy. I told him if you are the man I take you to be you have not a worse foe in the world. He'll no doubt draw you into conversation and tell you this, so I'll forestall him."

"You speak, too, as if you were in earnest about it."

"And I spoke to him in the same way. He thinks I was in earnest, anyhow. I learned who the fellow is, and that may interest you not a little."

"You think so?"

"Have you suspected that he is in disguise?"

"No, I hadn't; but, now that you mention it I can see that it is possible he may be."

"Well, he is, and he has told me privately that he is the great Western detective, Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"The deuce!"

"But, he stated it in a peculiar fashion, giving me to understand that he was lying, if I wanted to take it in that way."

"A detective's trick, maybe. You have interested me beyond measure, sir. I cannot see through your object in telling me all this. Surely you can have nothing to gain by it."

"I'll tell you something further of what passed between me and that man; and then you will have the whole of it. I heard something of the talk between him and you

on the piazza, when he wanted to fight you, you are aware."

"Yes."

"Well, he wanted to know who I took you to be, and I fell in with his own suspicion, telling him I took you to be a man who was once known here as Captain Mask. But, I added to that the statement that now I was greatly puzzled, for here is a man wearing a mask who answers to that name; and so, as I said to him, I am all at sea in the matter."

"As you said to him—Confound it, man, you are making the charge to my teeth!"

"I beg your pardon, if I have given you that impression; I could have nothing to gain, since what I have heard you declare on the point. But, really, sir, you do look strikingly like a person I have seen before."

This in lower tone.

"And who was that person, pray?"

"His name was Elmer St. Clair," the Sport whispered.

The man of the dark face and steely eyes gave a start, staring at the Sport, whose eyes were fixed upon his own.

"Where did you know a man of that name?" he demanded.

"In New York."

"When?"

"A year ago."

"What do you know about him?"

"He fell into a snap by marrying a rich widow."

"And you mean to tell me that I look strikingly like him, sir?"

"I do. You are about his build, and your face resembles his very closely indeed."

"Well, if I take your word for it, sir, I must ask what ax *you* have to grind by telling me all this."

"Can't you see? Here is a fellow saying he is Deadwood Dick, the great detective, and he is after *you*. If you *are* Elmer St. Clair, I'm putting you onto the scheme."

"For which I would certainly have reason to thank you, were I that person, but I am not. Are you aware, sir, that this Elmer St. Clair murdered his wife—the rich widow, came West with all her money and jewels, and that the police are looking for him everywhere?"

CHAPTER V.

PUZZLED ALL AROUND.

It was now the Red-and-yellow Sport's turn to show surprise at what he heard from this man's lips.

He looked at the dark-visaged man keenly, and his gaze was met by a stare as steady and unquailing as his own.

"You puzzle me, sir," Gold Jack made remark. "If you are not St. Clair, and it would not be reasonable to hold that you are, after such a statement, you are certainly well-informed concerning him."

"Yes, I admit that. I have heard all about the matter. He married less than a year ago, and about three months later he murdered his wife in cold blood, took all her wealth, and decamped, and since that time the police have been eagerly hunting for him."

"Was that his true name, then?" the Red-and-yellow Sport asked.

"That is what I do not know. It seems that he appeared in New York all at once, and without any history of his past, so far as can be learned now when it is most wanted. If *you* can throw any light upon it, and would communicate with the police, you might put the right clue into their hands and be the means of leading to the arrest of the rascal."

"A thing which I would not do if I could, and could not do if I would—not knowing anything about the man."

"As I inferred, when you asked if that was his true name."

"You inferred that I would not if I could?"

"No; that you could not, was what I meant; but, I might have added the other as well, for I take it that you knew him in a friendly way."

"Well, I won't deny it; and, you could not expect me to be the one to put the police on his track, even if I could do it, which I cannot. I would be the last person in the world to prove false to a friend."

"Then this man was your friend?"

"Well, he was not my enemy."

"You speak reservedly."

"It might be dangerous to speak otherwise, under such circumstances. You can hardly blame me."

"No, I suppose not. I hope you and I will come to get better acquainted, Mr. Gold Jack—the only name by which I know you."

"That name is good enough, Mr. Hyne. Yes, I trust we shall come to know each other better. By the way, are you acquainted with either of these sportish women?"

"No, I am not."

"They do not appear to be known to each other."

"It does not appear that they are, but it is impossible to say as to that. I admire the little beauty."

"Then why don't you make her acquaintance?"

"Was thinking I would try it, presently. The other would be a fitting companion for Captain Mask."

"Because, like him, she is masked, eh?"

"Yes; a mystery."

While talking, the Red-and-yellow Sport had been keeping close watch, and had noted that the dark man was observing closely everything that was going on in the room.

He was a puzzle—a mystery—to Gold Jack. Who and what was he, anyhow? Was he the true Captain Mask, as Bill Bluff so positively declared? Was he Elmer St. Clair, the murderer, as the Red-and-yellow Sport himself had hinted? If neither of these, was he a detective?

The two men had some further talk together, of no moment to the interests of our story, and separated.

Gold Jack stepped aside into an alcove intended for privacy, and here took from his pocket a photograph which he inspected closely for some moments.

"There can scarcely be any doubt," he said to himself, "and yet—there is a doubt. If this man is St. Clair the murderer, why was he so free to talk about the crime?"

The Red-and-yellow Sport was puzzled, badly.

He returned the photograph to his pocket, and stepping out into the "parlor" again, paced up and down, his hands behind him.

"I fail to understand anything of all this," he mused. "I ought to arrest the fellow, for this photograph is warrant enough for me to do so; but, I can't understand him. No, I'll give him a little rope and see what he will do. He can't get away from me. Besides, if he is St. Clair he has now reason, after what I said, to believe I would not give him away."

While he sauntered around, communing thus with his thoughts, he was at the same time taking in all that was going on.

He noticed that Mr. Hyne had spoken to Nobby Nancy, and as she did not appear to be in any way averse to making his acquaintance the two were standing together watching the progress of one of the games.

They were talking.

"Got your eye on them, Sport, have you?" said a voice in Gold Jack's ear.

The Red-and-yellow Sport looked quickly around to see who it was had thus addressed him.

He saw no face, but the mask of him called Captain Mask.

"I'm taking in all that's worth seeing,

sir," the gorgeously arrayed sport made answer.

"I meant that pair in particular, though. I thought you had an eye out for Nobby Nancy, as she calls herself."

"No, not at all, sir. Yes, now that you call my attention to it, Mr. Hyne does seem to have made a good impression there, sure enough."

"Then the lady is nothing to you?"

"What leads you to ask a question like that?"

"Well, you are both rather gay in the matter of dress, and the thought came to me that you might be something to each other."

"You may as well get that idea out of your head, sir. By the way, have you any objection to a little chat? I have something to mention that may be of interest to you."

"No objection whatever, if that's the case."

They took seats near where they had been standing, Gold Jack with his back to the wall so that he could see all that was going on.

"Do you know anything about that fellow who calls himself Bill Bluff?" the Red-and-yellow Sport made inquiry, as a beginning to what he had to say, speaking in a guarded tone.

"Not a thing, sir," was the prompt answer. "He is a stranger here, the same as yourself."

"You will not be offended if I speak plainly?"

"Not a bit."

"It's nothing to me, you know, no funeral of mine," Gold Jack preliminarily, in the same confidential way, "but I thought I'd put you onto him so you could look out for him."

"What are you getting at?"

"That fellow is a detective, Captain Mask."

"Well, that does not trouble me greatly, my gay cavalier."

"So much the better for your peace of mind, then, that's all. He has an eye on you."

"And you have taken enough interest in me to put me on my guard, eh? Well, I am obliged to you, of course, but I know of no reason why a detective should be on my track."

"That is still better yet, sir. It will be of no interest to you to hear anything more, then, perhaps."

"On the contrary, you have awakened my curiosity, now."

"If that is so I must satisfy it, I suppose, as far as I can. Well, the attention of this fellow is divided between you and Mr. Hyne over 'here.'

"Has an eye on us both, eh?"

"He seems puzzled to decide which is the man he wants."

"You talk in riddles, now, sir. Can't you make it a little clearer as you go along?"

"Well, I'll tell all I can, and at once. He is looking for a masked man who threw him over a cliff some time ago, and he thinks Hyne there is the person; but, here you are, with a mask, and he is in uncertainty."

"He hadn't ought to be in uncertainty, if he saw the face of the man he wants."

"And he did, and declares that Hyne must be the man; but, Hyne declares emphatically he is not, and the man don't know where he's at, so to say. Now, did you ever hear of two Captain Masks hereabouts?"

"I never did. I'm the original and only, so far as I know. I think I'll seize the first opportunity for a talk with that fellow, and set him right if I can. I have a reason for wearing a mask, and it is my own personal matter and nobody's business."

"You put that plain enough, anyhow; there's no excuse for not understanding your meaning."

"Not that I meant to be brusque with you, Sport, but that's the fact, plain and simple."

But, do you know who Bill Bluff really is? I saw you and him together, and thought you were pards to some extent."

"I warded off a difficulty between him and Hyne, and took the opportunity to find out what was the trouble, telling him a little romance to draw him out. I have found out who he is, unless he lies to me. He says he is the great Western detective, Deadwood Dick, Junior."

Captain Mask gave a start.

"Is it possible?—no, it can't be! I have heard of that fellow many times, but have never seen him."

"Why do you say impossible?"

"He does not look it, for one thing—but, I suppose he is in disguise. And then, too, why should he let out to you who he is? That does not look reasonable, to say the least."

"You have got it for what it's worth, the same as it came to me."

"And I don't consider it worth much. He does not want to monkey around me with any of his dirty suspicions, however. By the way, you do not know anything about that masked woman, do you?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"I notice she seems to have an eye on Mr. Hyne."

"Yes, I have thought so, too, and the more so since he has talked with Nobby Nancy."

Little more was said, and when the Red-and-yellow Sport moved away he was still more puzzled than ever. There seemed no beginning or any ending, nor a place to lay hold upon anywhere. He was "all at sea" indeed.

CHAPTER VI.

WONDERFULLY MUDDLED.

THAT evening spent in the Palace Parlor was one full of interest for all.

There were no exciting scenes, but there was a good deal of quiet watching, and studying of character, although it amounted to little in the end.

John Hyne, the man from Omaha, gave his attention to Nobby Nancy nearly all the time, and she seemed to like his company very well. Together they entered one of the games for awhile.

The masked woman, Keen Kate as she styled herself, had an eye upon them much of the time; though she, too, entered the games, and with considerable success. For awhile the Red-and-yellow Sport gave attention to this Keen Kate, but without finding much favor.

Captain Mask hovered near Nobby Nancy and John Hyne much of the time, and appeared to be decidedly interested in the little beauty in male attire. She was certainly attractive, and he was not by any means the only one who showed symptoms of being smitten with her charms. But others had to admit that Mr. Hyne had the advantage of them all.

Bill Bluff hung around in a dogged way, eying everybody, but John Hyne and Captain Mask were the especial objects of his attention. Gold Jack, however, came in for a share of it. That the bewhiskered man had his suspicions of the Red-and-yellow Sport was evident enough—that was, evident enough to the Sport himself. It did not appear to trouble him any, nevertheless. Gold Jack was a man of mystery to them all, it must be owned.

When the hour grew late and the crowd began to thin out, those in whom we have interest left one by one to seek repose.

John Hyne was about taking his departure, when Captain Mask accosted him.

"I'd like to have a talk with you, friend," he said.

"Very well, I can oblige you," Hyne answered. "Shall we sit down here for the chat?"

"I'll invite you to my house—callin'

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Proxy.

shanty a house out of politeness to you, if you will come there. What I have to say to you will not be lacking in interest."

"I will go," was the ready decision. "I know you not, and cannot say that I much like the idea of talking with a man whose face I cannot see, but none the less you are not so foolish as to suppose that I place myself in your power unarmed. I am able to take care of Number One."

"That is all right; you will have no use for weapons. I mean you no harm, but rather would do you a friendly turn, if you will let me."

"Lead on, then. This place of Pistol Butte is fairly bristling with strange things, seems to me."

The masked man promptly rose, and together they passed out.

Now the Red-and-yellow Sport had been a quiet observer and listener to this, from a position of vantage, and he immediately left the room by another door.

When the masked man and Hyne reached the street, Gold Jack immediately had them under surveillance, and so kept them until they had entered a house or sizable shanty a little distance up the gulch.

The sport eagerly and hastily sought a place where he might see and hear, and fortune favored him.

The rear lean-to was open and he stepped in there, and a wide crack enabled him to see everything that was done in the main room, with a fair chance of hearing all that was said as well.

"Sit down, sir," Captain Mask invited his guest. "Not much of a place, but the best I have to offer."

"No apology necessary, sir," waived the dark, grim visitor. "Let me hear what it is you have to say, now, if you please, since I am here by invitation for that purpose only."

"I will not keep you in suspense," taking a seat himself and speaking in low tone, but not so low that the spying sport could not hear. "Before I begin, however, I would like to ask a question."

"You have leave to ask it."

"It is this: What do you know about this man called Gold Jack?"

"I know little or nothing about him. The fellow is a mystery and a puzzle to me, as I am free to admit."

"Will you believe it if I tell you you have formed the acquaintance of a dangerous man?"

"I accept your assertion as evidence to that end."

"Well, so he is. Has he appeared to you as your friend?"

"I cannot say that he has or has not. He has talked with me in some confidence."

"And at the same time he has an eye upon you to work you ill if he can. I have no interest in you, but I want to set you right upon some points."

"You, too, are a riddle to me."

"And one you are not likely to guess, but I'll try not to talk in riddles for the time being. This man suspects you of being a murderer, one Elmer St. Clair, and means you no good."

"I have already talked with him on that subject."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and his suspicion lies between me and you, I can see."

The eyes of the dark, grim man met those of the masked man in a steady and searching scrutiny.

It was a search that could find little satisfaction, however, since the mask was in the way. And the Red-and-yellow Sport, found it aggravating in the extreme.

"I must have a look at that masked face, when chance offers," he said to himself. "And if no chance offers, then I must make the opportunity, somehow. This trying mystery all around is mighty worrying."

If Hyne is St. Clair, he's as cool a rascal as I ever tackled."

"How can he suspect me?" the masked man demanded. "You must be astray in that assertion, are you not?"

"Not unless my suspicion in the matter amounts to naught. I certainly am not Elmer St. Clair, as I have tried to convince him, and he is interested in you to a marked degree."

"Well, that is strange. Who is this Elmer St. Clair, anyhow?"

"A murderer, wanted by the police of New York."

"Do I understand, then, that you are an officer from that city, and that you are here after him?"

"It is all in your imagination, if you do, sir; I have said nothing of the sort. I am simply John Hyne, of Omaha. Have you told me all you brought me here to tell me?"

"No, not yet. I have only begun. Be patient with me, since my only object is to set you right and get you out of danger if I can do that."

"How am I in danger?"
"I have had a hint that you look very much like the missing man St. Clair, and there is the possibility that you may be arrested for the crime and dragged off to New York in spite of yourself."

"From whom have you this information that I look like St. Clair?"

"From Gold Jack himself."

"Then he has been playing a double role, it seems."

"It looks that way, certainly. He has been your friend and my friend, in his anxiety for our welfare."

"But from whom is this danger? Do you know of any officer here from New York who would be likely to make such an attempt upon me as you mention?"

"This fellow Gold Jack has given me a pointer."

"What is it?"
"You know the fellow Bill Bluff, who went for you this afternoon—that is, are you aware just who he is?"

"Who is he?"

"You answer my question by asking one. But, no matter; this Sport tells me the fellow claims to be Deadwood Dick, the great detective. What do you think about it?"

"He does not show any of his greatness, if so. But, then, the man is in disguise and playing a part."

"Have you ever seen Deadwood Dick?"

"No."
"Was going to say if you had, it would pay to get a look at this man's face and so settle the question."

"Maybe you have seen him?"
"For my own part I do not believe he is the man at all. But, now to the main point: Why is this Sport so interested in you and me?"

"I give that up."
"Does it not strike you that maybe he is the murderer St. Clair?"

"I have thought of that, but he does not quite answer the description of the murderer. Wish I had a picture of the fellow, that would settle it."

"But, you haven't."
"No, worse luck. Now, this man Bluff takes me to be a fellow who once threw him off a cliff. He is mistaken. I never was in such a situation with any man. I insisted upon it. Then he accused me of being one Captain Mask. That is your name here, I believe. Maybe you are the man he is after."

"No, sir, can't be; for, as it is shown, he swears you are the man because he recognizes your face."

"It is mystery—mystery. Are there two Captain Masks?"

"No; I'm the original and only. I have been here almost ever since this camp was commenced, too. But, now, if this man

Bluff is Deadwood Dick, and he recognizes you as a man he wants, or as St. Clair, as Gold Jack hints, you are in danger, and you ought to light out for home."

"Thank you, but I'm no coward. Besides, that would put them after me with a vengeance, if such is the suspicion."

"Well, then, could you not put Bluff onto the Sport as the man he wants?"

"Bluff insists that I am his man, though."

"Well, now, why has this Sport taken pains to tell both you and me to look out for Bill Bluff? That is about what it amounts to, in brief."

"He told me because he once knew this man St. Clair, and took me to be him and wanted to put me on my guard. I think he believes yet that I am he; but, he is friendly toward the murderer."

"Is that so? Then it cannot be that he is a detective, too. I had a suspicion that way. We must get hold of this man Bluff and wring his secret out of him, somehow. Still, that will not do, unless it can be done secretly. Now, I will tell you what my suspicion is."

"Tell me."

"It if that you are the man St. Clair, and you are in deadly peril here. I am not your foe, by any means, and would not give you away; but, I do caution you to get out as quickly and as quietly as you can. If you can assume a disguise, so much the better."

CHAPTER VII.

IN CAPTAIN MASK'S CABIN.

If ever there was a puzzled man, that man was Gold Jack, as he listened to all this in his place of hiding, and watched the two men as they talked.

He was a cool thinker, but here was a jumble of mystery that he could not begin to get out of tangle in his mind, try as he would. At the moment when one thread seemed clear, something else was said to tangle it worse than before.

One thing was plain, and that was, that these two men had formed a rather complex opinion of himself.

Here it was hinted that he might be the murderer, or a detective, or a friend to the murderer, or a foe to them in friendly guise, or anything of half a dozen other possible and impossible things.

Here, however, was the latest and most interesting assertion of all, that Hyne was really the murderer.

This was Gold Jack's belief, too, based upon the photograph.

The dark man smiled grimly as Captain Mask voiced his suspicion. His nerve was something remarkable, if guilty.

"You are as wide of the truth as pole from pole," he declared. "If I look like St. Clair, that is accident; I certainly am not he. And now, tell me, please, how it is that you are so strong in your suspicion of me?"

Captain Mask was silent for a moment.

"Let us suppose things for a moment," he spoke, when he spoke finally. "Suppose this man Bluff really is Deadwood Dick, as he claims to be, and that he is after this murderer. If he recognizes you as the man, he must have a reason for it. Maybe he has a photograph to aid him."

"If so, I would like to see it."

"Why not ask him? If you are innocent, you ought to push the matter."

"You advised differently a moment ago."

"Under different circumstances. Now I'm holding you innocent, as you declare you are."

"Then you were shamming before. But, no matter, if we fence with words it will do no harm to either, both being innocent."

"Would you hint that I am guilty?"

"Not at all; but, this man's attention is divided between you and me."

"See here, it is easy for me to prove that

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Proxy.

I am not St. Clair, if it is coming to that. Ask anybody how long I have been here, and see what you will learn. I have been here several years, like a sticker. This man St. Clair is only a year out of New York."

"Less than a year, sir."

"All the better. You can get proof all you want that I have not been out of Pistol Butte for more than a day in all that time. That nails the suspicion that I can be Elmer St. Clair."

"The proof seems sufficient."

"Can you yourself furnish proof as good?"

"I can if it becomes necessary for me to do so."

"Then no more need be said on this line, and our talk may as well end. If I cannot do you a friendly turn, then my object fails."

"Will you tell me why you desired to do me a friendly turn at all?"

"That is a point which I really do not care to dwell upon. If I have taken a little friendly interest in you, let it rest at that."

"This awakens my curiosity in you, sir. It even leads me to suspect that you may be the guilty man, in spite of all your proof. What if you have a double who plays this masked role with you?"

"That's a novel idea, truly. It sounds like a romancer's plot. No, you are guessing wildly. Let it rest that I merely took the notion into my head to give you a word of warning, so that you might slip out of the hands of the officers, if such these fellows are."

"It does not satisfy me. Show me your face."

"Ha! ha! That's a cool request, truly, when no man has seen my face these ten years. No, sir; it can't be done!"

"Why do you wear a mask?"

"Must I tell you it is no man's business? I once heard of a man who wore a mask because he had no face—that is, because in a fight with a foe his nose and cheeks had been cut out, or off, and he was a hideous spectacle."

"You do not say this is your own case."

"Nor do I say it is not. If you inquire, you will learn that a couple of men have come to their death by trying to unmask me. I say this as a warning hint to any other whose curiosity is likely to get the better of his judgment."

"Till I see your face, then, the suspicion will lurk in my mind, spite of all, that you are St. Clair the murderer."

"See here, then, and let me give you one more proof. If you suspected that of me, might I not suspect that you are a detective come to hunt St. Clair down? Might I not say *you* are Deadwood Dick? And if I were St. Clair, would not I take your life when I have it in my power as I have this moment?"

"Try drawing a weapon, sir, and see which of us will make the quickest time in the act."

"Pah! you are already under cover. Cover me, if you want to, for I am willing to let you see I mean you no harm, and then rise from your chair and look behind you."

"I take you at your word," the dark man said, coolly, where many another would have leaped up in a fright and looked, thus being thrown off guard; "and will cover you as you say." And he suited action to the word.

The masked man sat still, cool and calm like the other.

"Now carry out the other part of my request," he spoke. "Get up and take a look at the chair in which you are sitting. See whether your life has not been in my power every second you have been here."

The dark man rose keeping his man covered, and looked at the chair.

Of a sudden the side of the shanty, or a space of it, fell open, and the chair was

gone, while a breath of damp air swept up from a depth as the wall closed again in place,

"With your weight, the act would have been twice as quick," the masked man declared.

"I admit that you had me, there," the dark man remarked, as coolly and as calmly as ever. "But, how is it now? Who has the best of the situation as it stands now?"

It certainly looked as though he, the dark man had, and so the Red-and-yellow Sport would have been willing to bet.

That the masked man had been distanced one point seemed clear enough. He sat apparently helpless, while the other was standing over him with drawn revolver in hand.

"I'm not going to admit that you have, anyhow," was the cool rejoinder to the query made. "You have seen one surprise; you may see another that you are no more prepared for. But, put up your weapon, for there is no need for us to war against each other."

"Could I not force you to unmask, if so inclined?"

"You could not; and, take warning and do not try it. Come, I have shown you that I held your life in my hands; take it as proof that I am not your foe, and that I have no reason to fear you. I could have sent you down into that hole and no one would ever have known your fate. Put up your weapon, sir, and our interview will be at an end."

"And nothing lost or gained on either side, I take it. Well, I put up my weapon, since, as you say, we have no need to fight. While I am obliged to you for the warning you have given me, the warning was unnecessary."

The dark man returned his revolver to his pocket, and Captain Mask rose and held out his hand.

"Let us part friends," he proposed. "I admit, now, that you had me that time, and you could have forced me to unmask; but, it would have done you no good, and would only have been a source of regret to you all the rest of your life."

Mr. Hyne shook hands with him,

"I thought I had the best of it, and, if necessary, would have forced the point to an issue; but, you had spared my life and I could not so soon forget it. We may not part friends, exactly, since neither really knows the other, but we may remain at least neutral, for the time being, neither friends nor foes."

"I am willing to have it that way, sir."

"There is just one thing I would like to ask before I go."

"And what is that?"

"You spoke about my having reason to regret it all my life, had I forced you to show your face. Tell me why."

"Have you so soon forgotten the horrible picture I drew awhile ago? This mask may hide a hideous sight that would haunt you to your tomb. I do not say it does, but the application, to you, is the same."

"Well, I will not urge further, but leave you, still more mystified than when I came."

"I will not admit the same on my part, but that is of no moment. You will have something to think about. I hope, however, that I have satisfied you upon the main points at issue; that I am Captain Mask and nobody else, and that I am not the person this fellow Bluff is looking for."

"The proof seems clear that you are not Elmer St. Clair, at any rate."

"You can verify what I have told you by asking the old citizens here. They will tell you I have been here right along, and hence I cannot be any one else than I appear."

"There can only one theory be brought up in argument against that, and that is,

that you may have a partner who plays the role with you."

"That is folly. It would have been discovered ere this. Besides, where was the motive?"

"Well, I go, puzzled. Good-night."

And so they parted, and Mr. Hyne opened the door and passed out.

The Red-and-yellow Sport remained where he was, perfectly silent, hoping he might see the mysterious man now unmask.

Still it was hardly to be expected, if he had lived ten years in that camp and no one had yet seen his face. The Sport had no reason to think he was the first who had ever watched him at night.

Captain Mask fastened the door after his visitor had gone, and threw himself upon a chair, laying his head on his hand in a thoughtful manner, and so remained for some moments. And when he roused up it was with a sigh. He kicked off his boots, opened his bunk, and then—put out the light.

Gold Jack drew away from his place of observation with disappointment, and was moving silently out, when he felt the presence of another person there in the narrow confines of the lean-to.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOLD JACK AND KEEN KATE.

THE instant the Red-and-yellow Sport felt this presence, he stopped short, in the act of taking another step.

Feel the presence he certainly had, for there had been no sound to attract his attention, and he certainly had not seen any person. He felt that he was not the only one there.

With drawn weapon, he waited.

There was no sound, but the next moment something dark passed between him and the partly-open door.

In another second it was gone, as silently as a shadow, and Gold Jack took the step he had been pausing in the act of taking and was at the door himself, when he could see further.

A few steps distant was a woman, hastening from the door.

Gold Jack sprung after her, silently, and was within reach of her before she discovered him.

With a startled gasp she turned upon him, and in the dim light he noted who it was, though her face was not to be seen.

It was Keen Kate, the Card Sharp.

"Be not alarmed," Gold Jack hastened to say. "As you and I have been witnessing the same play, I would like to hear your opinion of it."

"I know you not, sir, or what you mean," was the cold response.

"Your manner would convince me, did I not know differently, madam. You have just come out of that shanty yonder, where I was hiding myself. What did you think of what we saw?"

"I do not acknowledge your right to question me, sir. Do me the favor to leave me, instantly."

"I'm going to question you, whether I have the right or not, all the same," the Sport pleasantly but firmly declared. "We are both guilty of the same offense—spying, and you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. I tell you this so that you may at least repose a grain of confidence in me."

"Why should I do that?"

"You did not know I was there, and yet here I have admitted to you that I was there."

"I see nothing in that to give me confidence in you."

"I could have held you at a disadvantage, knowing your secret while you had no knowledge of mine. Don't you see? Come, we'll walk in the direction of the hotel as we talk. Do you know either of those men?"

"I do not; and, I would ask you the same question."

"No, I know neither of them. Both are men of mystery to me, Keen Kate."

"Why were you spying upon them?"

"To learn what I could about them. The same question to you, with your kind permission."

"The same answer, sir."

"Do you suspect either of them of being any particular person of whom you have knowledge?"

"Not now. I did have such a suspicion."

"Are you willing to tell me anything about your suspicion?—what it was and who you took the men to be?"

"I am not willing."

"Why?"

"For the reason that you are a stranger to me. You may be my most bitter foe for all the proof I have to the contrary."

"I am the foe to no woman, madam."

"Perhaps you will tell me, then, something in the same line. You have suspicions, surely, or you would not have been found watching them. What are your suspicions, sir?"

"I have none, now."

"That is strange."

"The mystery is so great that my suspicions do not count. I am certain in my opinions, or I am very wide of the mark. I know not which it is."

"And you will tell me nothing."

"For the same reason you gave me. We shall have to declare ourselves to each other, madam, or remain reserved. We dare not speak out and trust each other, that is plain enough."

"There is no reason why we should. We can at least understand each other on one point, however."

"And on what one is that?"

"Well, I would not dare to have it known that I was in that shanty to-night. If you will keep my secret I will keep yours."

"There is where we differ, for I care not whether mine is kept or not. You see, then, I still have the advantage of you, though I appeared to give you the same hold upon me I had upon you."

"It was an unfair trick!"

"No, you mistake; it was perfectly fair, at that point; I could not know you would hold the thing any more in fear than I would."

"You speak thoughtlessly, there, for you are a man while I am a woman."

"Perhaps you are right, but, you are a stranger to me, and some women are as brave and bold as the average man. I see, though, there is little use of our trying to get points from each other."

"I guess you are right."

"There is one hint I will let drop, though, and we can see whether or not we both have the same intention toward these men."

"Not a bad idea, that."

"Well, I have been the means, this day, of putting both of them on their guard against a possible danger that threatens them. You do not need a prophet to make that plain to you."

"It looks as though you are friendly toward them."

"You see it is plain. Now, can you show the same degree of confidence in me? By this means we may come to an understanding."

"You would not mind telling me what the danger is, of which you speak?"

"Well, you are taking advantage of me unfairly. Still, I will give you a hint as to that, too. A detective is here in this camp, and he has his eye upon the pair."

"And you told them that?"

"Yes."

"What does this detective want? and who is he?"

"A woman for asking questions, every

time! You are bound to get information without giving any, if you can, I see."

"You have it in your power to refuse to answer."

"I will answer this one, but no more. The detective is Deadwood Dick, and he is hunting for a murderer."

"Deadwood Dick! I wish I could see him! He is the very man I would most desire to see at this time— But, no, that is not true, either. Tell me, though, who is he, here?"

"Do you know him, then?"

"Only by reputation. I have never seen him."

"I take it, then, you would make use of him in a professional way, madam."

"Are you Deadwood Dick?"

"I? Do I look like a man able to wear his reputation? Were I he, would I be likely to be going around putting men on my own track? If you will think, madam, you will see it is rather absurd."

"Then who are you?"

"Gold Jack, of California. Who are you?"

"Keen Kate, the Card Sharp."

"You certainly are not dull. I turned your question back upon yourself, and you cut it nicely."

"My question was not the one I meant to ask, sir. I meant to repeat the one I had asked just before that; who Deadwood Dick is, here—that is, what character is he in?"

"You have seen the fellow who calls himself Bill Bluff?"

"Yes, I have seen him."

"Well, he is the man. I have heard him say so. You will not, of course, tell him who informed you, if you speak to him."

"Perhaps not. But, sir, you are a mystery to me, I must confess."

"Not half so much a mystery as you are to everybody. Will you permit me to ask you why you wear a mask?"

"One can hardly prevent questions, sir, though one may decline to answer the questions asked. I will say, though, that I wear it to conceal my face from public gaze."

The Red-and-yellow Sport laughed lightly.

"You are well-named," he declared. "I see it is folly for me to try to get your secret away from you. I cannot complain. Let me say, however, that if you need help at any time in any of your undertakings, let me know. That is, anything that is not to the harm of these two men whom we have been watching and listening to."

"I shall hardly need your help, then, sir."

"That is what I guessed. You and I were shadowing them with different motives. By the way, I shall not mention what I have seen and heard; I will not ask you what you will do."

"Then why mention it?"

"If that secret gets out, you will know it was not I who let it out. If I hear of it, I shall suspect it was you who told it."

"It will not trouble me, what you think, sir; but, it may be known to many others besides us. This is of little importance, though; and, here we are at the hotel, I will leave you."

"You will talk with me again at another time?"

"Perhaps. Please do not tell what you know of my doings this night."

The Red-and-yellow Sport did not promise, but was moving away, lifting his hat as they parted.

"I now understand, Sport, why you were so cool about the little beauty," a voice at his elbow made remark, a moment later.

Gold Jack looked quickly and there was, Mr. Hyne.

"Ah! this you, Mr. Hyne?" he greeted. "You have caught me in the act, as I must confess."

The Red-and-yellow Sport had thought

over the situation with the rapidity of lightning, and more. It was impossible that this man had seen him and the woman come from the rear of the shanty, and more impossible that he could have overheard their talk, for they had spoken in very low tones. It was plain, though, that he had been watching them as they approached the hotel, at least.

There was a brief and bantering exchange of remarks, after which each retired to his room for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL-AROUND CONFIDENCES.

On the following morning the Red-and-yellow Sport found opportunity for a talk with Bill Bluff.

"Well, what progress are you making?" he inquired.

"None at all, to speak of," the answer. "I'm sure of my man, though, for it is impossible for me to mistake that face."

"That is a hard point to get around, that's true, but the man appears to hold off well, spite of all suspicion. How are you going to deal with him, anyhow, Deadwood Dick?"

"Don't call me by that name, for you might give me away. Call me plain Bill Bluff, and let it go at that."

"Well, all right, if you want it so. But, answer my question."

"I am only holdin' off to give you a chance, as we seemed to agree. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I am more interested in Captain Mask, to tell you the truth, Mr. Bluff. And, by the way, I am going to put you on your guard against that fellow, or you may get into trouble."

"Seems to me you are wearing a double face all around, Gold Jack. You are a friend to me, and the next I see you are a friend to the other side. You was as friendly as could be with this man Hyne and Captain Mask, last night. A feller can't tell how to take you."

"You need not doubt what I told you at first. Do not trust too much to appearances."

"If a fellow didn't trust his eyes, he'd get left a good many times."

"And sometimes he gets left when he does trust his eyes. If Hyne is the man I take him to be, he and I are no friends, as I have already told you. But, you need not publish this abroad. I'll prove to you that I am not your foe, anyhow."

"And how will you do that?"

"By putting you up to a trick that might cost you your life if you fell into the trap."

"Well, if you done that, that would give me some good reason to believe what ye tell me, that is so. What is the trick?"

The Red-and-yellow Sport had ere this noticed that Bill Bluff had a double manner of speaking; that was, that at times his language was fairly good and at other times he dropped into the ordinary dialect of the West.

This, however, ought to have been easily accounted for, since the man had admitted his identity as Deadwood Dick.

"I will warn you to beware of Captain Mask," the Sport repeated. "And, if you enter his shanty for any purpose whatever, be doubly on your guard then. Mind, I tell you this secretly."

"But, you don't tell me anything in particular to look out for. I might tell you to look out sharp for Mayor Mason, and you wouldn't be any the wiser how to look out for him. If that is all you know, it's only a general warnin', after all. What is his trap?"

"That is what I am going to tell you now. In his shanty is a certain chair, near the wall on the east side of the main room, and that chair is so set that it can topple over into a dark hole without a second's warning, and away goes the man who happens to be in it.

If Captain Mask invites you to his house, and offers you that chair, look out."

The bewhiskered man looked at the Sport keenly.

"How do you know all this?" he inquired.

"That part of the matter I do not feel inclined to tell, sir; but, you may put full faith in the statement."

"Then do you think the man in the mask is Captain Mask, after all? But, no, fer that would throw my own theory out of j'nt. It is a puzzle, and no mistake about that."

"It is, truly."

"Well, now, Sport, seeing that you have told me somethin' with good intent, I'll tell you somethin' the same."

"Very well, sir."

"That chair ain't the only dangerous spot in that shanty, as I happen to know myself."

"Where is the other?"

"Opposite to it, on the other side of the room. One place is just as bad as the other. That's all I have got to say, now; don't ask me how I come to know; Deadwood Dick is supposed to know things."

Gold Jack was puzzled anew.

He had given this man the warning, so that he might not blindly walk into a trap, and found him already in possession of the secret, knowing more about it than he knew himself.

"Then it seems I gave you no news."

"I have the proof that your intention was good, all the same. Now, are you going to warn that dark fellow, too?"

"No; I'll let him walk into it, if he wants to; but, I guess there is no danger, for he and Captain Mask seem to be on friendly terms."

"Maybe they are pards, working the same game."

"I can't say, as to that. You will have to form your own opinion. You are still sure Hyne is your man, you say?"

"I'm sure he is the one that pitched me over the cliff. There's no mistaking that fact, that is sure. I'll settle with him before he leaves this camp, too, and don't you forget it."

"Well, Bill Bluff, see here."

"What is it?"

"You and I have shown each other that we are not foes, at any rate. Now, I will trust you with a secret. I do this because you have let me know who you really are. But, you must promise on your word of honor not to let it out."

"All right, I'll do that, pard."

"Take a look at this photo, then."

The Sport drew from his pocket the photograph of Elmer St. Clair, passing it over to Mr. Bluff for his inspection.

"The dark fellow, Hyne, by Jupiter!"

"There can hardly be any doubt about that, can there?"

"It's a sure thing, Sport. This is the man that's my mutton, sure as you are here."

"And so is he my mutton, too, as you express it, for he is the man I came to this place to find. We can't both have him."

"But, who are you, Sport? Who is the man?"

"I am a detective, like yourself, and if there is no mistake, this man is a murderer."

The Red-and-yellow Sport was watching his companion closely as he said this, but there was nothing in Bill Bluff's manner to indicate unusual surprise.

"And what's his name?"

"His name is Elmer St. Clair—that is, if there is no mistake in the person. If there is, then I'm all at sea, as I have said before."

"Why do you speak about a doubt? Isn't it as plain as can be that he *is* the man? What more proof do you want than this photo?"

"Would you arrest him on that evidence?"

"Why, of course I would. What more do you want, anyhow?"

"I thought I'd give him plenty of rope, so that he could hang himself all in good shape. Now, as we are both detectives, we understand each other."

"Then you are not really lookin' for Captain Mask, as you said at first?"

"Well, no; you can understand now all about that."

"Why have you told me all this?"

"Because you are Deadwood Dick, and you can, if you will, aid me greatly in the work I have in hand."

"And lose my own revenge, eh? But, you will say it will be revenge anyhow if I can be the means of helping to send that fellow to the gallows. What part do you want me to play?"

"We will determine that later on. There is plenty of time. Yes, you ought to be satisfied with revenge of that kind, surely. You could not do any worse to him than that, anyhow, being an officer of the law; that is, unless you dealt out justice with your own hand."

"That was what I intended to do. Where are you from?"

"New York."

This talk had taken place in a quiet corner of the public room of the Park House, and at this point Mr. Hyne sauntered up.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he saluted.

"The same to you, sir," responded the Red-and-yellow Sport. "Won't you sit down?"

"I might interrupt a private conversation by accepting."

"We'll take the risk of that, and you will never be the wiser anyhow, so, sit down."

"All right, I will do so, and if your talk has to be stopped don't blame me, but blame yourselves. I know detectives do their talking in private, or always want to, at least."

"Detectives?"

"That was the word I used."

"What has put the bee in your bonnet that *I* am a detective?" asked the Sport, quietly.

"The fact that you and Mr. Bluff here are much together, and I suspect that he is one from the fact that I have found out he is not what he seems."

"You are kicking the wind now," declared Mr. Bluff.

"All right, I know what I am talking about. But, I can give you a tip that might be of use to you, if you are what I suspect."

"Which I don't acknowledge, for one," spoke the Sport.

"No, nor I," the other.

"Then I'll give you the word of caution all the same. I do so, however, in a measure of secrecy, so that you need not run blindly into danger. See? You must beware of the shanty of Captain Mask."

Bill Bluff looked at first one and the other, in surprise, while the Sport coolly eyed the dark man.

"Why this warning?" the Sport asked.

"Because I would not want to see you run your heads into danger, since you might do so, blindly, did I not warn you."

"And in what does this danger consist, Mr. Hyne?"

"You will promise not to give me away if I reveal something to you? I care not who you are, my duty is to warn you of danger, and if I misplace my confidence and you betray me, so be it. Do you promise?"

They promised, and the dark man gave them substantially the same warning the Sport had just been giving Bill Bluff.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN MASK UNMASKS.

A WEEK passed, a week in which nothing was done and nothing gained, so far as could be openly seen.

Yet the different personages of our

romance had not been idle. Each had succeeded admirably in delving deeper into a mystery that seemed to be altogether incomprehensible.

Not only was each man and woman a mystery to every other, apparently, but everybody seemed to be working at cross-purpose against everybody else. There was neither head nor tail to the matter at which they were striving to attain. What they were aiming at only each himself knew.

And yet this does not seem true, for each had, apparently, made a confidant of some other, with the exception of Captain Mask himself.

Yes, the two women were exceptions, too.

One day Captain Mask came to Gold Jack, with an air of business, and asked him to come to his shanty.

"I want to have a talk with you, sir," he explained, "and I want to have it in private—that is, in a place where I will know there can be no listeners."

"All right," the Red-and yellow Sport agreed, "I'll go with you. I have no other matter on hand, so my time is yours."

Accordingly, he accompanied the man of the mask to his humble abode, and entered.

"Here we are, now," the masked man said, closing the door. "We can have a chat and no one be the wiser concerning what we have talked about. Take a seat and be at home."

He waved his hand toward a chair on the side of the room, the same one which the Sport had seen to disappear on another occasion.

"Yes, I am most always at home wherever I am," was the easy and careless reply. And as he made it, the Sport stepped to the chair, picked it up, and put it beside the table.

This was done in such a careless way that no suspicion could be awakened, by the act alone.

"Will you smoke?" asked he of the mask, pushing forward some cigars.

"I smoke occasionally, but do not care to do so now, thank you," the friendly response.

"What did you want to see me for?"

The table was near the center of the room, and the masked man had already taken his seat on one side of it.

"I will tell you that, sir, and right to the point," he answered, promptly. "I want to demand why you are shadowing me."

"Are you not making a mistake?"

"No, sir, I am not; I have been keeping my eye on you of late, and I am fully satisfied that you have me under watch."

"Can you say I have been paying any more attention to you than to other men around the camp? It is true that you have awakened my curiosity, owing to your mask, and perhaps I am guilty of having studied you a little."

"Well, I know you for what you are."

"More than I can say of you."

"I know it. I have the best of you there. You are an accursed detective, and that is the reason I demand to know what you want with me."

"I would like to see your face, that is all I could ask," the Sport said, as coolly as he always was.

"Your want is one you will never get, then, sir," Captain Mask declared. "I want to know, now, if you suspect me of anything, the reason I am shadowed."

"Is not some one else shadowing you more than I am?"

"You mean that man Hyne?"

"Turn your mind upon Bill Bluff, for instance."

"I have been considering him, and the idea that he can be Deadwood Dick is out of reason."

"Do you know Deadwood Dick?"

"No."

"Then how can you decide that?"

"Because this man does not carry out the

character as one would look for the role to be played."

"From what I have heard, it is just that deceptive art that has won the detective all his successes. Instead of wasting your time with me, look to him, Captain Mask."

"My attention is being given to you, now, sir. I demanded to know just who and what you are."

Captain Mask leaned back in his chair, and a revolver covered the Sport.

Gold Jack simply smiled.

"That was cleverly done," he admitted. "I was looking for something of the kind, but you got there ahead of my eye."

"And I mean business, too, as you will learn, so you had better make a clean admission of everything, sir. What is your right name, and what is your business here at Pistol Butte?"

The Red-and-yellow Sport's gaze passed the man of the mask, looking beyond him.

Captain Mask, seeing this, almost turned his head, but checked himself in the act and brought his weapon up to full cover of the Sport's heart.

"Your trick don't work," he said, exultingly. "You thought to get the drop on me, but you can't do it that way. Now, then, for your story in full, and I want the proof of it, too."

"You had better go slow, Sir Masker."

The voice was behind the man of the mask, and with the words a cold tube was pressed behind his ear.

Captain Mask started, but still kept his cover of the Sport.

The person who had entered the cabin, noiselessly, from the rear lean-to, was no other than Keen Kate.

"Remove that weapon," Captain Mask ordered, sternly, "or it means death to this man before me. I have suspected that you two were working together."

"In which you have been mistaken, sir," the woman rejoined, coolly. "I care nothing for him. Fire if you dare; it will mean your death in the same instant, I assure you."

"You can bet it will," put in another voice.

This time it was Bill Bluff, who stepped in at the front door, he having a weapon in hand, too.

"My suspicions were well grounded all around," the masked man coolly observed, on seeing this new-comer. "It proves that I have been watched constantly. Sport, your friends were prompt to come to your aid."

"I have nothing in common with them, sir," the Sport declared. "They are here on their own account."

"I am, for one," spoke the woman. "I am determined to see your face."

"You are doomed to disappointment."

"I guess not, then," cried Mr. Bluff. "I second that motion, and I'll third it, too, if you don't off with that mask in double-quick time."

Captain Mask rose to his feet with deliberation.

"You are three against one," he said. "You have it in your power to force your demand. Before you do this I have one request I would make."

"What is that?"

"That you will not tell my secret to others. I warn you that you will behold a hideous sight, when my mask is removed."

"I do not believe it," cried the woman. "If you are the man I take you to be, your face is not hideous."

"Then you know not who I am. However, do you mean to force me to this?"

"Yes, I do, for one," the woman, firmly replied.

"Same here," from Bluff.

"Well, then, behold!"

The man lifted his mask, just for a mo-

ment—merely a brief second, and the most ghastly sight imaginable was shown.

His face was like that of a skeleton, almost, save that the eyes were there in horrible prominence. The flesh was gone, and the jaws were ghastly and grinning in the half-dim light of the room.

"My God!" gasped the woman; and she fell back, replacing her weapon, and ran out of the shanty in horror.

Bill Bluff, too, uttered an ejaculation, and drew back, staring at the immediately replaced mask like one dazed with astonishment.

The Red-and-yellow Sport was the only one who kept cool.

"Now, be satisfied," the man of the mask spoke, sadly. "You have seen; spare me the pain of having my secret generally known."

"I'll never mention it," Mr. Bluff promised. "Come, Gold Jack, this is no place for you, from the way I found you when I came in. Let's go and leave the poor unfortunate alone with his sorrow."

"Do not mind me," the cool Sport responded. "I'll talk with the gentleman awhile before I go."

"But, he had the drop on you, and meant you mischief."

"There is no reason why he should, now, so I'm going to remain. Go on, and honor his request and do not tell what you have seen."

"All right, it's your own funeral, so I'll be off."

With that Mr. Bluff got out, evidently glad to go, and the Red-and-yellow Sport leaned back in his chair, the man of the mask resuming his seat, with a sigh, replacing his revolver.

"Well, you have seen," he said.

"Yes, and I pity you, sir. I will not ask for your story."

"I would not tell you did you do so. But, be it enough for you to know that I live only for revenge. Sooner or later it must come."

"Which is enough for me to understand the rest. No one could blame you. I hope, now, you will no further have mistrust of me, sir. If I was curious, my curiosity ought to be more than satisfied."

"I should think so, sir. You will not tell?"

"You need not ask that. I do not yet understand why you were so aggressive against me a moment ago, however."

"I thought to scare you off, so that you would not give further attention to me, that was all. Now that my secret is out, however, that comes to nothing. You are at liberty to go."

"And I'll leave you, for I can understand that you would want to be alone. I do not see, however, what you can hope to gain by your attentions to Nobby Nancy, so afflicted as you are. You could never hope to wed her, and—"

"You are making my burden heavier than I can bear, sir," the sharp interruption. "Go, and at once! If my face is gone I have still a heart and passions like other men. If I would snatch a moment of happiness, would you rob me of that? Leave me to my sorrow, Gold Jack, but do not tell her—not yet."

The masked man let his head fall upon the table, upon his arm, and the Red-and-yellow Sport stole softly from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

KEEN KATE'S LOVE.

As Gold Jack left the shanty and turned his steps toward the hotel, a smile was on his lips.

"A clever trick," he mused. "As clever a trick as I ever heard of, and something new, too. He fooled the others, but he did

not fool me. However, I will allow him to think so for the present."

When he entered the Park House, the first man he met was Mr. Hyne.

"Captain Mask has just been favored with some visitors, I noticed," Mr. Hyne observed, in his calm way.

"Of whom I was one," the Sport as quietly added.

"Yes, as I am aware. I was about bending my own steps in that direction, when I saw the others come out. What was up?"

"Captain Mask has unmasked."

"Ha! this is something interesting! What sort of face has he to show?"

"That is a painful secret, painful for him, Mr. Hyne. Do not make it known when I have told you. He has no face at all."

"Is that so?"

"Ask the others who saw it. The woman left in haste, horrified, and Bill Bluff was not far behind her. I did not tarry a great while, as you know. The most hideous spectacle I ever beheld."

"If that is the case, there is something funny about the man."

"We are well aware of that—that is to say, we have known it all along. We considered it funny that he should wear a mask."

"I now refer to something else. It is strange that he will pay attention to this Girl Sport, Nobby Nancy, as he is doing, when he knows he could not hope to marry her."

"He evidently has no thought in that direction. He is merely getting a little pleasure from her society."

"But, he seems to be really stuck on the girl."

"I mentioned it to him, and he cut me short and requested me to leave him alone at once. So, I did not tarry longer. In the same connection, Mr. Hyne, don't you think you owe that girl a duty?"

"What is that?"

"I am not blind to the fact that you are somewhat awake to her charms, and I would think you would warn her against this Captain Mask. You know him for what he is. Even giving him the excuse for wearing a mask, that does not explain the terrible death chair, so to call it, he has in his shanty."

"No, you are right, and a rascal he must be, spite of all."

"Then why not tell her?"

"I have thought about it, but it would look as though I wanted to oust him to make room for myself."

"What need you care how it looks, so long as you tell the truth about the matter? She ought to be warned, for no knowing what foolish romantic love he may awaken in her heart."

"That's so, and it began to dawn upon me that I'm the proper one to give her the warning, after all, for, to confess the truth to you, Sport, I admire the little beauty more than you might guess. I have been watching her, and she is as pure as an angel."

"I heartily agree with you in that."

"Seems strange that you have not fallen under her gentle glance, a victim, Gold Jack."

"Could you know my story, Mr. Hyne, you would not think it strange that I do not. But, this story is one I cannot tell, so do not require it of me. Suppose we change the subject."

So they did, spending the rest of the time in talking about things of no interest to our romance.

It was in the afternoon that Gold Jack went for a stroll up the gulch, and deep in thought about the peculiar affair in which he was interested he sat down on a boulder in an out-of-the-way nook.

He was trying to study out the things that

puzzled him, and paid little attention to his surroundings until he heard voices coming near.

Rousing, then, he found to his satisfaction that he was out of sight from the trail.

It was a rugged, ragged spot, with many little crooks and turns branching off from the trail invitingly, and he had wandered into one of these to the place he was now in.

The voices he heard were those of a man and a woman.

With a keen ear and a good memory he soon recognized the man's voice, and in another minute that of the woman as well.

They were John Hyne and Keen Kate.

The Red-and-yellow Sport remained quiet, intending to go out and return to the camp as soon as they had passed, but in that he was balked.

Like himself, the couple strolled into one of the little by-paths, and came so close to where he was that they were just on the other side of the big boulder in a spot where the path ended.

"Why, here is no outlet!" the masked woman exclaimed.

"You are right," was the response. "Here is, however, an inviting seat; suppose we sit down for a few minutes before we return. We could not find a more favorable spot for the talk you desired to have with me."

"You are right, Mr. Hyne, and I agree. We certainly cannot be overheard in such a place, for I assure you I shall not speak louder than this."

Which was plenty loud enough for the ears of the Red-and-yellow Sport, whose interest was awakened.

"There is little danger that any one will hear. I take it, then, this you have to tell me is something you would not want known."

"You are right, Mr. Hyne. It is something which costs me a great trial, as you will understand when I have told you, and something which you must never mention under any circumstances."

"My interest is more keenly awake than ever, madam."

"You thought it strange, no doubt, when I pushed myself into an invitation for such a walk as this, but it was with this one purpose in view, as I have already told you—that I might have a private talk with you."

"It is all right, madam. You have nothing to blame yourself for, that I am able to see. A woman should have the same rights as a man, under similar circumstances."

"Ha! I am glad you have said so!"

"Why?"

"Because it renders easier the confession I have to make."

"A confession? an' to me, madam? What mystery is here? You increase my desire to know who you are."

"I am going to disclose my identity to you, sir, for I have no need to keep it longer a secret here—especially from you. Are you prepared to be startled?"

"Yes, I am fully prepared, Keen Kate."

"Then I will startle you with an honest confession I must make, and that is—that I love you."

"Great Scott! Madam, you cannot—"

"I feared it, I feared I should startle you so that my object could never be attained; but, hear me, I beg you."

"Yes, I will hear you. Proceed, madam."

"Call me Kate, if only for the occasion and never again. Yes, I love you, and I made up my mind to tell you. Why should not a woman have the same right as a man in such matters?"

"No reason that can be defended, madam—I mean Kate, by request—no reason whatever."

"So I think. Where a man or woman, free to marry, sees one of the opposite sex to whom the whole soul goes out in love, that one ought to speak; for, it may be,

the whole future of both is there to be made or lost."

"There is logic in that, truly."

"And that is the reason I make the confession I have made to you. When I first saw you my heart leaped with love born in a moment, for you are my ideal, and it would be sin for me to keep still and make my whole future miserable and broken. Can you love me in return, Mr. Hyne?"

"How do you know that I am free to accept your love, Keen Kate?"

"Good heavens! do not tell me you are not! That would kill me! I have been almost maddened, seeing the attention you have paid to that Girl Sport, Nobby Nancy. Tell me you are free."

"Well, yes, I am free; but—"

"Thank Heaven for that! What, though, were you about to add?"

"I was going to ask you how I could answer your question, never having seen your face."

"Pardon me, I did not think. So earnest was I, so selfish, it may be, that my mask was for the moment forgotten. Behold me, then."

The Red-and-yellow Sport, in his place of hiding, would have given much for a glimpse of the face he knew was now revealed, but the privilege was denied him, for it was impossible.

"You are certainly beautiful, Kate," he heard the dark man say, immediately. "But, there is something more than a pretty face a man must look to in making his selection. For myself, I would prefer beauty of character. I know absolutely nothing about you."

"I will tell you all, truthfully and fully. Do you think you could love me, Mr. Hyne?"

"Your face is even fairer than I would demand, Keen Kate."

"But, my history—there is, alas! a blot on that."

She said this sadly, and for some time there was silence.

"Tell me your story, please," the dark man gently urged. "I can now guess the reason you have shown interest in Captain Mask."

"What is your guess?"

"That at some time in the past he has worked you injury, and you came here in this disguise to take revenge upon him."

"You strike it exactly, sir; but I have found that Captain Mask is not the man I took him to be, and so the trail is lost and my vengeance has to go unsatisfied. Lucky for him he is not Howard Koyle."

"What was Howard Koyle to you?"

"My lover once; my betrayer and deserter afterward—curse him!"

This was said with all the bitterness the voice could summon, and after a moment's pause, she added:

"I thought I loved him, then, for I was young; now that I know what real love is, I can see it was only fancy. And I thought he loved me—I need not tell you how sure I was of his fidelity. I have been seeking him everywhere—seeking his life. I thought I had him here, but he has escaped me."

CHAPTER XII.

STRANGE THINGS COME ABOUT.

THAT Gold Jack was interested in what he heard need not be said.

He was more than interested, and wanted to hear the rest of this strange woman's story.

And, too, no less interested was the dark man who was suspected of being the murderer, Elmer St. Clair. He, however, was in a dilemma.

He could not believe the woman was insane, her manner was too steady and earnest for that—she was too greatly in earnest to suit his peace of mind. He hardly dared disappoint her.

The Red-and-yellow Sport would have

given much to see as well as hear, but that was out of the question. He already knew how keen a fellow the dark man was, and he knew that to venture from his present excellent place of concealment might betray his presence and so ruin all.

There was silence again for some moments.

"I certainly pity you, with all my heart," Mr. Hyne presently remarked, soberly.

"Your pity I will not despise," rejoined the woman, quickly, "for love is sometimes born of pity, but it is your love I want."

"And love is a thing one cannot command at will," the return to that.

"Will you try to love me?"

"You must not demand any answer of me till I have heard everything you have to tell me, Keen Kate. For one thing, I have no idea what your true name is. I do not for a moment suppose you have come here in your true name, which, transposed, might be Kate Keen."

"You are right, I have not given my true name, Mr. Hyne. My name, as I will tell you truthfully, is Lucia Reever. Keen Kate is a name I gave myself when I set out upon my hunt for Howard Koyle."

"And who is, or was, this Howard Koyle?"

"A rascally knave, as I now know to my sorrow! I had good reason to believe he was here as Captain Mask, but now I have seen the face of that man of mystery and it is not he."

"You have seen the face of Captain Mask?"

"Yes; and the reason he wears a mask is to hide his terrible disfigurement. His face has no flesh upon it."

"It must be horrible to look upon. But, can you be sure this is not Howard Koyle? Maybe he has become thus disfigured since you knew him."

"No, it is not he, for the hair and eyes are not his. No, I was mistaken, and must admit that I followed a wrong clue in coming here. But, I have found something more precious than vengeance."

The woman had her mask still raised, and Mr. Hyne could watch her features and countenance as she talked.

He could not discover anything beyond extreme earnestness in her manner. He certainly did not consider her as either mad or insane. It was probable that she had confessed the simple truth.

"Tell me all about yourself and this man," he demanded.

"I met him first at Ogden, where my home is, and there he was well liked and highly respected. I have told you the result of our meeting. He deserted me, and it then came out that he had at least one wife living, that he had deceived me, and when he was gone the police had occasion to look for him for robbery. That he was a rascal cannot be doubted."

"And you meant to kill him?"

"I did, I certainly did. He does not deserve to live. But, I have lost him, and if you can forgive my past and make me happy I will give up the search."

"Now it becomes necessary for me to speak very plainly, Miss Reever—"

"Still call me Keen Kate, please. See, I replace my mask, and no one else shall see my face or know my identity, much less hear my story. I anticipate the refusal you are about to make, and know that I deserve the sorrow it will bring. I cannot complain."

"You anticipate too quickly, Kate. Hear what I have to say, first. Now, you have taken the man's part to make love and seek the one of your choice; you will not deny me the right to the woman's part, will you?"

"And what is that?"

"Time in which to think it all over before giving you a decided answer."

"Delay means danger, and it shows me already that you do not love me. Can it be that you do love Nobby Nancy?"

"Nonsense! I have been merely passing some pleasant hours with her, that is all."

"Then let this pleasure cease, or it may mean danger."

"In what way?"

"I am not sure that I could control my jealous temper, and I might do her harm that I would be sorry for the next moment."

Gold Jack guessed the truth, and it also dawned upon Mr. Hyne.

There is scarcely a dividing line between aroused jealousy and insanity, and here was jealousy that lay like powder awaiting a match.

"Well, I will promise you one thing, then," Mr. Hyne proposed. "I will not have anything more to do with this Nobby Nancy until I have given you my decision in the matter which you hold to be of such vital interest."

"Yes, I do hold it as vital, Mr. Hyne. Did you ever love, with all your heart and mind?"

"I never have, thus far in my life, Keen Kate."

"Then you cannot understand what I feel for you. Do not cast me off if you can help it, for it will mean my death. Life will have no further charm for me. When will you give me my answer?"

"In one week."

"Must I wait so long?"

"I must have time in which to weigh the matter well. It is a serious thing for us both. And, you ought to know more about me—"

"No, no; I care not who or what you are; you have my love—you have my life devotion, and whether you are good or bad makes no difference. Yet, of course, my preference would be that I should find in you all that's true and noble and good."

"Why are you so reckless?"

"I am not reckless, but trusting. I am what I am, just what I have confessed to you, no better and no worse; I am not in position to demand that you shall be perfect. Can you overlook my past? Can you trust me for the future? Can you give me the chance to prove my devotion to you by a lifelong service? I'll give it willingly, will you but let me."

"Let me test your devotion. What if I am guilty of some terrible crime, and likely to be arrested at any moment?"

Gold Jack pricked up his ears immediately, and the photograph in his pocket seemed to burn him.

Was he not on the point of further proof, if further could be asked?

"I care not," was the response. "Let me be the one to help you to elude the officers of the law, if that be so."

"There is no room for me to doubt the sincerity of your confession of love for me, Keen Kate, and I will not betray your confidence in me. And, in one week you shall have your answer. Come, let us return to the camp."

"I am ready. Do not despise me, even though you can not love me."

"That I will never do."

They rose and left the spot, and their steps died away in the distance.

"Well, I'm beat," said the Red-and-yellow Sport, as he came out upon the main trail. "I'll bet that woman has got a heart of gold, for it has cost her much to make a confession like that, as she said."

He waited for them to get out of sight, when he bent his steps toward the camp.

"It's a pity the rascal isn't deserving of her," he added. "There is hardly any doubt about his being St. Clair—in fact, how can there be, when I have the photograph of the man to guide me? I'll corner him and see what he will say, anyhow. I

think he'll have to admit, when I present my proof."

An hour later Gold Jack and Mr. Hyne met in the Park House public room.

"Won't you come up to my room?" the Sport invited.

"What for?" asked the other.

"I want to have a confidential talk with you."

"Yes, I'll go, then. Lead on."

So they went up, and when the Sport had closed the door he and his visitor took seats.

"Well, Elmer St. Clair, don't you think this farce has gone far enough?" Gold Jack demanded.

The man laughed, responding:

"You are determined, after all I have said, to hold that I am he, are you?"

"When the proof is so plain as it is in this case, sir, there is little room for doubt. Keep your hands up in sight, please."

"They are up, as you see. I have no intention of trying to draw on you, as I see you have a hand on a weapon already. I do not think you mean to kill me unless to protect yourself."

"You are right. You still deny, then, that you are Elmer St. Clair?"

"I do, most emphatically."

"Tell me, then, whose photograph this is."

The Sport took the photograph from his pocket and handed it to the man, who gave a great start as his eyes fell upon the face it pictured.

"My own face, by great!" he cried.

"Of course it is; and still you deny your identity."

"Do you mean to tell me this is the photograph of Elmer St. Clair, the murderer?"

"It is."

"Then I cannot blame you for your suspicion of me, sir. But, here is a mistake. In some way a photograph of myself has come to play this part. Where did you get it?"

"It was given into my hands by the family of the murdered woman, who employed me to hunt down the murderer and bring him to justice."

"Then you are a detective?"

"As you know."

"The same am I. What confounded mix are we into, anyhow? Who are you, Gold Jack?"

"Let me ask who you are, since you deny, even yet, that you are Elmer St. Clair, the original of this likeness."

"Yes, I do deny it, and I can prove it, too. I am Phil Brown, a detective from New York City, and I am here in hunt of this man St. Clair. I had never seen his picture, or I might have been tempted to put myself under arrest. But, there is a big mistake somewhere, for this picture is certainly mine."

CHAPTER XIII.

DENYING THE PROOFS.

THE two men looked at each other in a puzzled manner. Here was a situation which neither could clearly understand.

That each suspected the other of falsehood or double dealing was plain, but it was not so plain how, or in what way, the deception was being directed. There was mystery on every hand.

Gold Jack had the best reason to think the other was lying to him, for the photograph of Elmer St. Clair, the murderer, was also the photograph of this self-styled detective. Then, added to that, was the remark he had heard the man make while talking with Keen Kate.

"You say you can prove what you claim?" the Red-and-yellow Sport asked.

"Yes, I can, sir. Can you prove what you claim? I am inclined to believe you are trying to trick me."

"Certainly I can prove it, sir. But, how do you suspect I am trying to play you a trick?"

"By putting this photograph under my nose."

"You admit it is yours."

"I would be a fool to deny it."

"But you do deny that you are Elmer St. Clair."

"Positively."

"Then, where does the trick come in? This is certainly the photograph that was given to me as the likeness of St. Clair."

"How do I know that? I have only your word for it. It may be one you have somehow obtained of myself, for it surely is mine, and it may be that you are the murderer I am in search of."

"You have a description of him, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Just read it, and see if it fits me."

"But, you may be in a clever disguise, for what I can say, sir."

"A man can't very well disguise his height and the color of his eyes, anyhow, sir."

The dark man took some papers from an inner pocket, and from among them selected out the one required for the occasion.

It was a description of Elmer St. Clair, and it fit the dark man himself as closely as a word description could be made to fit. The man seemed surprised himself as he read.

"Well, this is amazing," he said, thoughtfully. "I never recognized before that it was really a description of myself."

"And that, together with this photograph, would be sufficient proof for me to put you under arrest."

"But, I'm an officer myself, sir; see here, the proofs I have of it."

He displayed some papers and letters, inviting the Sport to inspect them at pleasure.

And this the Red-and-yellow Sport did not hesitate to do.

He found a warrant for the arrest of Elmer St. Clair, some letters from the New York Police Department, and other evidences that the man told the truth.

But, even as he read, a new suspicion flashed upon his mind. Perhaps this fellow has thrown the real Phil Brown off the cliff, in the manner Bill Bluff claimed to have been served by him. Perhaps Bill Bluff was Phil Brown himself!

"Are you satisfied with the proofs?" Mr. Hyne asked.

"Yes, the proofs are all right," was the reply, "but I am not satisfied that you are their rightful possessor, sir."

"But, I am, I swear it."

"I have only your word for that; the proof is all the other way. This photograph and the word description prove that you are Elmer St. Clair."

"Well, who are you?"

"I am a detective from New York, too, privately engaged to work upon this case. What my name is does not matter, since I cannot trust you—at any rate not yet. We cannot trust each other."

"That is plain. Can you prove your claim?"

"Here is a badge, sir."

"If you would not accept my proofs, neither can I accept yours. This badge may be a stolen one, for what I know about it."

"On your side, there is proof against your story. On my side there is none. But, I do not ask you to take my word for it. I think the time is coming pretty soon, by the signs, when this thing will be cleared up."

"I certainly hope so."

"Will you answer a question, Mr. Hyne?"

"Yes."

"What did you mean by the remark you made to Keen Kate this afternoon?"

The dark man gave a start.

"Did you overhear that talk?" he cried.

"Yes; you came there within arm's length

of me, and I had to hear it; could not help myself. You asked her what she would think of you if it came out that you had done some terrible crime, and were a fugitive from justice, or words to that effect. What did you mean by that?"

"I was trying her, to see just how deep her devotion really did lie."

"Hyne, see here: if you are St. Clair you are an actor of the first water. If you are not he, then you are in a deuced dilemma, that's all."

"I don't see where the dilemma comes in."

"Why, any jury in the world would hang you for St. Clair."

"Well, I guess not. You take me a prisoner to New York, and see how soon Phil Brown's identity will be established."

"That may be easy to say here, but would it hold water if put to the test."

"I can't prove it to you, here, but I could prove it there. But, by the way, do not let out the confession I have made to you of my identity; and, do not let out what you overheard, for the woman would think that I have told it."

"Yes, I agree so that, for you and I must come to an understanding here and now. Can you agree to something proposed by me?"

"I guess so, since you are inclined to be reasonable."

"Very well. We suspect each other, and there is a natful of mystery here to be sifted. I'll have an eye on you, and no doubt you will keep me under watch, too, but we can agree not to stand in each other's way in our movements against others. We have two men here whom we must prove up."

"I agree to such a treaty of peace, Gold Jack. Now, who are the men you speak about?"

"Captain Mask and Bill Bluff."

"But, you have seen Captain Mask's face, and you know who Bill Bluff is."

"I'm not satisfied in either case. We must get at them in such a way that a shadow of doubt cannot remain regarding either."

"Then you invite me to work with you, practically, do you?"

"We have both the same object in view, according to what we tell each other, the finding and arrest of Elmer St. Clair."

"Yes, that is it."

"Then we may as well work together from this time on, and by so doing you can perhaps the sooner wipe out the suspicions that stand arrayed aginst you. This photograph must have been given me in mistake, or Elmer St. Clair must be your double; no other explanation can be found."

"I cannot make head or tail of it, Gold Jack. What is your lay-out for our proceeding, then?"

"Nothing is planned, yet, but we must hold the main object in view."

"All right, I'm with you."

Some time later the Red-and-yellow Sport ran up against Bill Bluff, in the Palace Parlor, and Bluff desired to talk with him.

They sat down there, the Sport willing to give him all the opportunity he asked for.

"I'm beginning to think I want to square accounts with that man Hyne," Mr. Bluff remarked, opening the subject.

"The bargain was that you were to wait and give me all the opportunity I wanted before you did so."

"I know it, but now that I've seen Captain Mask's face, and there ain't any doubt, I want to pitch into him. There wasn't any doubt, anyhow."

"Because you recognized the face?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, now, look at this photograph and see whose it is."

"That's him!"

"Well, it isn't, Mr. Bluff."

"What! Do you mean to tell me I can't see?"

"This is not the same man, anyhow—or,

at least, so he says. Now, do you suppose there could be two men looking so much alike?"

"Not by a big lump there couldn't! That sort o' thing is all right in tales, and such, but you never hear of it in real life."

"Then our man Hyne is a wonderful actor, that's all. Now, it seems, this is the photograph of three persons, and the puzzle is, to say which it belongs to. Can you solve the riddle?"

"I hardly reckon I can. But, you say three persons? Who are they?"

"Well, first, this man Hyne. Then, Captain Mask, as he was seen by you when he threw you off the cliff, as you have told. And then, too, it is the likeness of a murderer for whom the police are looking everywhere."

"It does look sort of tangled, don't it."

"Yes, I should say it does. What did you think of Captain Mask's face?"

"Terrible, wasn't it! I don't wonder that fellow wears a mask; I'd want to wear a bag over my head if it was me."

"He hasn't the cheek to show his face, as it were, eh?"

"That's a rough joke about the poor cuss, hang me if it ain't. I suppose he wears it, though, because he can't face the public without it."

"Ha! ha! That was no better than my own. But, you think, then, the fellow actually has lost his face, do you?"

"Think it? I know it! Didn't we see it for ourselves? What are you tryin' to drive at, anyhow?"

"I have a suspicion."

"What is it?"

"It is this: That fellow has a *double* disguise on. That is to say, that he is doubly masked. You know it was not very light where we saw him, and we had only a brief view."

"Ye do think that?" in awakened surprise.

"Yes, I do; and, we must get at the truth of the matter somehow. Can't we get into his cabin some night somehow, and catch him with his mask off entirely and see what he really does look like?"

"I reckon we can, if you mean it, Sport. You will find that Deadwood Dick is ripe for anything that comes up, and I think we'll be enough for him when he wakes up and finds us there. I haven't been asleep all the time since I came here, and I guess I know a thing or two about that shanty he roosts in."

CHAPTER XIV.

STILL IN THE DARK.

WHILE this conversation was going on, another of even more interest was in progress.

This was between Nobby Nancy and Captain Mask, on the piazza of the hotel, the Park House, where the natty Girl Sport was to be found nearly every afternoon.

"That's rather a hard thing to answer," we find Nobby Nancy saying, "when a fellow hasn't seen your face yet. When I get married I'm not going to marry without knowing what my choice looks like, you bet."

"What is your right name, Nan, anyhow?"

"Nobby Nancy."

"Get out. You know what I want."

"That's the only name I've got these days, Captain Mask. My name is like your face, out of sight for the present."

"But, you would tell me your name if I show you my face?"

"Yes."

"It's a bargain; I'll do it. But, not just now. Say, Nan, I love you, and I am willing to do anything to win you. Now, I'll tell you what my plan is."

"All right, go ahead."

"I'm going away from here pretty shortly, never to return, and I'd like to have you go with me. Will you go?"

"I don't know. This is like going it blind."

"But, I love you, Nan, and I'm not asking you to go it blind, as you call it. I am a fellow not so bad off for looks, as I'll tell you privately, and I'm pretty well off for cash. I'm going to light out this very night, and I would like you to come with me; but, I don't ask unreasonable things."

"That's pretty short notice."

"You are free, though, and your own mistress, and you can be ready."

"No, not to-night, anyhow. I have got to see a certain person here to-morrow on business. I might make it to-morrow night."

"Well, then, to-morrow night let it be. One day can hardly make any difference. I begin to have hope that you care something for me after all, the way you are taking to the plan."

"I don't know that I have any reason to dislike you."

"But, you say you won't go till you have seen my face?"

"That's about it, Captain Mask."

"Well, you shall see it. Meet me to-morrow night at ten, up by my shanty, and there I'll reveal my face to you and you can make up your mind what you will do. If it's go, all right; if not, all wrong—with me. But, I'll trust to you, for I am sure you have some regard for me."

"Where will we go?"

"To the big and growing Southwest, where we can settle down to enjoy the rest of our days in peace and quiet."

"Well, I won't give you any encouragement till I have seen your face. If you are too old, or too young, or too light, or too dark, or if you don't just exactly suit me, it's no match."

"I'm afraid my chances are slim, but still I'll hope. You must have some regard in my direction, to agree to meet me at all."

"Oh, don't be too sure of that, maybe it's only curiosity to get a sight at your face sir."

This was said playfully, and the Girl Sport rose to enter the house.

"You are jesting now," the masked man declared.

"Don't be too sure of that, either. But, maybe something will turn up to hinder my meeting you. I'll tell you something, if you don't know it already."

"What is that?"

"Why, Mr. Hyne, who is stopping here, seems stuck on me, too, and that other woman, the masked lady, is as jealous as sbt can be, and I have to watch her like a hawk for fear that she may do me some injury. I don't tell you this to make you jealous mind you."

"I have not been blind to all this, quite Nobby Nancy. By the way, what do you think of Hyne? How do you like his looks?"

"His looks are all right, Captain Mask. If your own are no worse we may be able to hitch up, as they say."

With a playful nod she left him, and he rose and sauntered away to his domicile.

About evening Mr. Hyne met Bill Bluff in the hotel.

"Just the man I want to see," he cried.

"Me?" Mr. Bluff queried.

"Yes, you. Will you come up to my room while we have a chat together? I want your help."

"I'm with you, certainly. Don't know as I can be of much help to you, but I'm willing to do what I can in anything that is right."

"And there's nothing wrong about this."

They went up, and when the dark man had closed the door, he said:

"Now, Bluff, what do you know about Nobby Nancy?"

"I know she's a mighty nobby gal, an that's about all I do know."

"That is all I know, too, about; but,"

now that much to a certainty. Have you found out anything about the masked one?"

"Not a thing, yet."

"I thought Deadwood Dick had a way of getting at all riddles, sooner or later."

"So he does, but I have tried very hard on these points, so I suppose it is not 'later' enough to report yet. Ha! ha!"

"Well, I want to ask you further what you think about the Red-and-yellow Sport."

"Blame me if I know. He seems all right."

"Do you think he is in love with Nobby Nancy?"

"If he is he is cool about it. Don't know that I have seen him saying half a dozen words to her."

"Well, say, how would you like to take the job of running him out of camp for me, if the pay is good enough?"

"How could I do that?"

"I don't know; that would be for you to invent."

"Well, I may as well tell you first as last that I can't do it. Gold Jack and me are pards, now, to a degree."

"Ho! that's the way it is, eh? Then I have put my foot in it finely, haven't I? Of course you will tell him what I have said, and there will be the deuce to pay. Now, I'd like to see what sort of looking man you are, Deadwood Dick."

"Sorry, but I can't oblige you. That all?"

"Yes, that's all, I suppose. But, if we couldn't make a bargain you can at least keep still about what I have said."

"I won't promise about that, either. This is a strange thing, what you have proposed to me, and you seem to forget that I have it in for you yet on account of that tussle on the cliff."

"Still have that foolish idea in your head, ave you?"

"When I see a face once I don't forget it gain in a hurry, and I'll never forget yours, ou bet."

"See here, Bill Bluff, or Deadwood Dick, or whoever you are, I'd like to have you tell me all about that matter, for I swear to you you are mistaken in your man. I never had a fight such as you mention."

"You know you lie, confound you! Might just as well tell me that I can't tell white from black."

"Well, tell me about it, and refresh my memory, then, since you are so sure."

"It's not necessary to repeat all the particulars, for you know them already, as well as I do, or better. You got the best of me in the struggle, and over the cliff I had to go. You thought I was dead, but here I am again, and I warn you that I am not going to give you much longer before I settle with ye."

"But, the particulars of it. Tell me everything that happened, just as it did happen."

"Bah! If you called me here to make a fool of me, don't think you can do it, for you can't. Look out for me, that's all, for to-morrow I'm going to begin in dead earnest."

With that the bewhiskered man got up hastily and left the room, and in a moment more was out of the house.

When he had gone, who should step out from a closet but the Red-and-yellow Sport.

"Well, what think?" Mr. Hyne asked.

"He is in earnest about his recognition of you, you can't get around that."

"Yes, and he is in earnest about his partnership with you. You run no risks in trusting him to-night."

"I think not. Well, this night must tell the story, one way or the other, and no telling what the outcome will be. It has been about as great a mystery as I ever tackled."

"You speak freely to me for the first time. Do you, then, begin to believe what I have declared?"

"You have impressed me, sir, but the photograph is still between us."

"Though even that has received a black eye."

"Yes, that is true, after what we have heard as the latest from Captain Mask. Have you seen the mayor yet?"

"No. Have you seen Watson, the landlord?"

"Yes, and he is interested in the move. There is likely to be a lively time, I can well imagine."

"And each of us will have his own private aides on guard, since we do not, and can not, trust each other fully. Don't know that I ever was in a case so dark."

"By which you warn me not to try to escape you, or to work you injury, eh? I understand, but I promise you faithfully that you have nothing to apprehend from me. What I have told you is the whole truth."

"Well, well, there is only one thing, then, and that is, to corner Captain Mask and bring him and this man Bluff face to face."

"That is our scheme, and Bluff will play his own detective."

Supper brought their talk to an end, and after supper the Red-and-yellow Sport spent a pleasant hour with Nobby Nancy on the piazza.

That night was a repetition of almost every other night in the camp, and the Palace Parlor drew the crowd as soon as it opened fully for business, and Keen Kate and the Girl Sport were among the number.

Here, though not in accord with the plans that had been laid by the two detectives, was to be played the last act in the drama, and revelations were to be made that would be a surprise to more than one person interested. Not only so, but tragic scenes were to be witnessed. However, let us not anticipate.

CHAPTER XV.

UNMASKING AND TRAGEDY.

BILL BLUFF had declared his ability to enter the shanty of Captain Mask at any time, by a secret way he had discovered.

This, it had been arranged between him and the Red-and-yellow Sport, he was to do on this night, when Captain Mask would be forced to show his hand—rather his face.

In this way Bill Bluff and Gold Jack were to work together; but on the other hand, the Red-and-yellow Sport and John Hyne were in it against both Bill Bluff and Captain Mask, desiring to bring these two worthies together, face to face, unmasked, eager to note the result.

Such was the arrangement, but it was carried out.

The same result was brought about in another, and even more effectual way, even though a more tragic.

It has been said somewhere in the preceding pages that the Palace Parlor had no bar, and did not cater to the rougher element of the camp, but that once in awhile the rough element was represented there all the same.

On this evening, when the place was under full headway with the business of the hour, one of the worst characters in the camp staggered in, having aboard just a sufficient quantity of the popular "jig-water" to make him "look for fight," and he had evidently come there to find it.

This fellow's name was Bowger, and he was familiarly known as "Big Bow-wow."

"Hyar I am," he bawled, spreading himself. "Hyar I am, the Big Bow-wow," as large as life and twicet as natural! What ar' ye goin' ter do about et?"

"We won't do anything about it, sir, if you carry yourself straight and observe order," one of the "bouncers" of the place promptly told him. "If you don't, you will be put out, that's all."

"I will, hey? Wull, let me 'mind ye that et will take jest two and a half like you ter do et, and don't ye forget et. Don't tackle ther job alone, unless ye have got yer

life 'sured. See? Katch on? Do ye git thar? Do ye come along wid me, Terry?"

This was said with all the force of tantalizing swagger the fellow could put on, as he stood with thumbs thrust in the armholes of his vest.

"You know what the rules are here," said the peacemaker, as he turned away. "See that you observe them."

"That's ther way to stand up to 'em," the fellow boasted. "See how he has business som'r's else when I bristle up to him? He knows ther Big Bow-wow, you kin bet he does."

With that he strutted down the room as steadily as his "jag" would admit of, and stopped at a table where the interest in the playing seemed to be greatest.

Here were seated Keen Kate, Captain Mask, the Red-and-yellow Sport, Nobby Nancy, and others, trying their hands at the exciting sport of "bucking the tiger," as it is popularly called.

Big Bow-wow looked on for a moment, standing behind Nobby Nancy, and presently he called out:

"That 'ar play is no good, gal; you want ter put et on t'other card."

"I am doing this," was the cool answer he got, the Girl Sport not so much as looking up at him.

"Oh! ye ar', ar' ye? Wull, I'm doin' this, an' don't ye kick when I do et, either. I admire beauty, I do, an' I'm goin' fer a kiss!"

Nobby Nancy tried to spring up, but the fellow caught her before she had time to do so, and imprinted a hearty kiss upon one of her blushing cheeks, to the disgust of all.

Almost in the same instant, however, he got his just deserts.

The Red-and-yellow Sport reached over the table and dealt him a blow between the eyes that sent him staggering back as though struck with a sledge.

"Take that, you scoundrel!" the Sport cried, fiercely.

"All were upon their feet now, and as the fellow recovered his balance he made the attempt to draw a weapon.

The man nearest him was Captain Mask, who gave him a fling that sent him in the opposite direction, when he collided with Bill Bluff, and down they went together in a heap.

Mad with rage, the drunken rascal began to fight. Mr. Bluff's disguise was torn off in the struggle, at about the same instant that Captain Mask laid hold upon the fellow to drag him off.

Big Bow-wow made a grab at the mask; it was snatched off, the death-face and all, at the same time that the peacemakers of the place pounced down upon the big ruffian, and rendered him powerless to do further damage, and Bill Bluff and Captain Mask stood face to face!

Captain Mask was the double of John Hyne, who stood staring at him as though struck dumb.

At the same moment a scream was heard from Keen Kate, and, weapon in hand, she made a spring toward Bill Bluff.

She was hardly quick enough, however, for, with a snarl, Bluff threw himself upon Captain Mask.

"Part them! Part them!" called Keen Kate. "That wretch is *my* prey!"

Weapon in hand, she was trying to get at the fellow; she had now discarded her mask, standing forth in all her royal beauty, her lips parted and her eyes dilated.

"Yes, part them, part them!" shouted John Hyne, himself crowding forward to aid in doing it. "At last a terrible suspicion comes upon me. I think I guess the terrible truth. Look out—that knife! Do not let the fellow use it—Oh! oh! Too late; *too late!*"

Too late, indeed!

Bill Bluff had managed to get a knife from his belt, and even as the dark detective call-

ed out the warning it was in his double's body.

"You fiend!" screamed Keen Kate, facing Bill Bluff like an avenging fury. "I will avenge my own wrongs and this blow together, curse you! Howard Koyle, your end is come. Die, at the hands of her whom you wronged!"

Before any one could interfere she fired, and the fellow dropped in his tracks, mortally wounded.

"Tell me who you are, man—tell me who you are!"

It was John Hyne who spoke, as he at once knelt on the floor beside his fallen double.

"Phil, I'm your brother," was the answer. "I'm Charles Brown, your twin brother. I tried to get you to go away; I tried to scare you off, but you would not hear me. You can now understand why I spared your life."

"My God! Charlie, do we meet at last, and thus? But, it is better so—far better so, if you are—are—"

"If you are Elmer St. Clair," supplied Gold Jack.

"Yes, I am he! I admit it, and I confess my crime. Yes, it is better so, Phil. But my death has already been avenged; so let it rest as it is."

"Your brother!" cried Keen Kate. "How glad I am that my hand has been the one to strike the avenger's blow for you! How glad I am that in avenging my own wrong I have done you a service!"

"Curse you all!" cried Bill Bluff—or, properly, Howard Koyle.

"See here, I thought you claimed to be Deadwood Dick," reminded Gold Jack.

"It's more likely you are him, yourself," was the snarling rejoinder.

Eyes were upon the Sport at once.

"Let us get all the information we can before these men die," the Sport suggested. "It seems you are not the original Captain Mask, Charles Brown."

"No, I am not," the response. "I'm willing to tell all I can about the whole matter."

"Do so, at once. We are eager to hear your story."

"Well, I put my wife out of the way, as you know, and with her money and jewels came West. I found I had to take some desperate step in order to throw the police off my track, and was eagerly in search of some means, when I ran up against Captain Mask on my way here."

"He stopped me, to rob me, but I resisted him, knowing the amount of wealth I had at stake, and after a struggle I pitched him over the cliff, as he claims. After that the thought came to me to assume his identity, and I searched till I found his body, when I relieved it of clothes and mask, still thinking him dead. Then I came to this camp, and learning all I could about the character I was to play, took possession of his shanty and began the role."

"I heard that Deadwood Dick was after me, and posting myself, met him on the trail at Winding Ledge, where we had a fight and I overcome him, by the merest chance, for, only for accident, he most certainly would have captured me then and there. I believed I had killed him, but now I think he, too, escaped with his life, and I have a suspicion that Gold Jack and Deadwood Dick are one and the same."

"Phil Brown, I beg your pardon," said Gold Jack, holding out his hand. "You see how it was. I am Deadwood Dick. I saw this man's face when we had the fight on the ledge, and when I saw you I took you to be my foe. I beg your pardon."

"And I beg yours, too, for the suspicions I have entertained regarding you. We have been playing at cross-purpose all the way through. But, let us hear what this other fellow has to say."

The two detectives had shaken hands, while speaking, and now they turned their attention to Howard Koyle.

"What have you to say for yourself?" Deadwood Dick demanded.

"Well, I have one thing to say, and that is, that I have got jest what I deserved, and I'm glad I am dying at the hands of Lucia Reever. That girl is an angel, even if she has killed me."

Keen Kate was standing by, head bowed, now trembling,

"Yes, an angel," the dying wretch repeated. "I deserve worse than this for my treatment of her; but, she is far better off than though she had wed me, for I am in no way worthy of her. Her heart is as big and noble as a heart can be. Lucia, I forgive you—I for—for—"

There was a gurgle in his throat, and he was dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

EXPLAINING AND ENDING.

With a sigh the woman turned away.

"I cannot pity him," she said. "I would do the same thing over again, for it was what I had sworn to do. My work is done, and I will go away—if I am permitted to do so."

She looked questioningly at Deadwood Dick. Would he put her under arrest?

"Stay," spoke up Nobby Nancy, the Girl Sport. "Let me befriend you. No one can blame you for what you have done. If you will let me, I will be your friend, and the future may have something bright in store for you. Do not go away, but remain."

"Tell me who you are, then."

"Yes, I can do so, now. I am the happy wife of my noble husband!" and as she said this, she laid her hand on Deadwood Dick's arm. At this he removed his hat and the false hair he had been wearing.

It was he, the redoubtable Richard, as he had declared, though the disguise had been so perfect no one could have guessed it.

"Can you befriend a creature so miserable?" the fair woman asked, her eyes suffused with tears. "I dare not accept your kind offer. No, let me go, I pray, to hide my shame where no one can know the truth."

"No, stay!" and peerless Kodak Kate laid a detaining hand on her arm. "Let me be your friend. We have proof of your true worth. I will not let you go."

"Yes, stay," urged Phil Brown.

She looked quickly up at him.

"Do you really wish it?" she asked.

He held out his hand to her. She took it for a moment, and sat down.

Phil stood near her, his hand laid gently on her shoulder, and though only Dick and Kate knew the truth, there were others who guessed it. He had given his answer!

Captain Mask—or he who had lately been known as Captain Mask, was now expiring.

"Phil?" he faintly called. "Phil!"

His brother at once knelt beside him, taking his hand, tears filling his eyes.

"Don't take my body East," was the dying request. "I don't deserve to be laid with the family. Bury me here, and don't let it be known who St. Clair really was. Will you?"

"I will," his brother answered.

"That is all I can ask. My end has come, and it is better so."

He said no more, and Phil held his hand until the end came.

All in the room had remained silent, and now a cloth was laid over the two bodies, hiding them from sight.

"Poor fellow, I'm sorry for him, in spite of the fact that he deserved it," remarked Deadwood Dick, with much feeling.

"It is better so," said Phil, sadly, "You will keep the secret?"

And Dick answered saying he would.

"He came pretty near doing me up," he added, "when I had that combat with him on the cliff, similar to the one he had with the original Captain Mask, and he thought he had finished me. But, I can forgive him,

for he kept his word with me and sent notice to my wife."

"Yes, he wrote to me, but without any signature," spoke up Kodak Kate. "and I came here at once with my aides, to search for my husband."

"Your aides?" queried Phil Brown.

"At your service," said a man in the crowd, and a rough fellow stepped to the front, taking off his disguise as he came.

It was Dolan Hardy, one of Deadwood Dick's bowers; and with him were Billy Bucket, Johnny Smile, and others. Kate had not been unattended or unguarded a single moment, and Dick had not been without ample help at hand.

"Will you tell us your brother's story?" [

Dick asked of Phil Brown.

"It is short and simple," was the response. "We are twins, and he was the bad boy of the pair. He was not simply mischievous, but bad, from the time he could walk and talk. Nothing could be done with him, and he grew worse instead of better.

"Finally at an early age, he ran away from home, and was never heard of again. It was thought that he had been killed. He had almost forgotten about him, and certainly I never expected to meet him again in this world. It has been a strange case all the way through."

"It has, indeed," Dick agreed. "Well, we have found St. Clair, and so we must report. The man's true name need never be known to any save those who know it here, and I am sure every person present will honor the promise you have made to your brother and keep the secret."

There was a general approval of that.

Armed with proofs of the death of "Elmer St. Clair," Phil Brown set out at once for New York, while Deadwood Dick sent his report by mail to the parties who had engaged his services in the case. That done he and Kate set out for home, "Keen Kate" going with them.

Before their going, however, Pistol Butte did herself proud in an entertainment in their honor, Mayor Mark Mason and Landlord Brad Watson exerting themselves to the utmost to make it an event never to be forgotten. And the chances were it never would be permitted to die in memory. The "Red-and-yellow Sport" and "Nobby Nancy" had made an impression that could not easily be effaced.

In due time Phil Brown rejoined them at Bristol City, where he had appointed to meet the woman who loved him.

He had, in the mean time, made inquiry concerning Lucia Reever, and what he had learned concerning her had only served to increase his admiration and respect for her. He returned to her a lover.

There was a quiet wedding at Bristol City at Deadwood Dick's residence, and a goodly delegation from Pistol Butte was in attendance. The woman's past was buried forever, and, happy in the love of the man she truly loved, life opened anew for her.

Phil had already resigned his position on the New York force and accepted a place on Deadwood Dick's staff—for, as has been said, Dick had now a regularly organized agency in the West—having found it necessary to provide himself with aides on account of the ever-increasing demands upon his time. Riches had in no wise made him forget the vow he had registered, to be a terror to evil and evil-doers forever.

That was his mission!

THE END.

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